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RAMAKRISHNA

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By

PROF. F. MAX MULLER

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THE MESSAGE OF OUR MASTER

By the First Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna

THE LIFE OF RAMAKRISHNA

BY
ROMAIN ROLLAND

Translated from the original French by
E. F. Malcolm-Smith, M.A., Ph.D. (Cantab.)
Late Research Fellow, Newnham College, Cambridge



ADVAITA ASHRAMA
MAYAVATI, ALMORA, HIMALAYAS

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RAMAKRISHNA THE MAN-GODS AND THE UNIVERSAL GOSPEL OF VIVEKANANDA

(A Study of Mysticism and Action in Living India)

VOLUME I

TO

MY FAITHFUL COMPANION

IN THIS PILGRIMAGE OF THE SOUL

MY SISTER MADELEINE

WITHOUT WHOM

I SHOULD NOT HAVE BEEN ABLE

TO ACCOMPLISH THIS LONG JOURNEY

R. R.

JANUARY, 1929

"MAN must rest, get his breath, refresh himself at the great living wells, which keep the freshness of the eternal. Where are they to be found, if not in the cradle of our race, on the sacred heights, whence flow on the one side the Indus and the Ganges, on the other the torrents of Persia, the rivers of Paradise? The West is too narrow. Greece is small: I stifle there. Judæa is dry: I pant there. Let me look towards Asia and the profound East for a little while. There lies my great poem, as vast as the Indian Ocean, blessed, gilded with the sun, the book of divine harmony wherein is no dissonance. A serene peace reigns there, and in the midst of conflict an infinite sweetness, a boundless fraternity, which spreads over all living things, an ocean (without bottom or bound) of love, of pity, of clemency. I have found the object of my search: The Bible of kindness."

Michelet: *The Bible of Humanity, 1864.*

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

In writing these two books I have had constant recourse to the advice of the Ramakrishna Mission, which has been kind enough to place all the requisite documents at my disposal. In particular I owe a great deal to the present venerable head of the Belur Math and Superior of the Order, Swami Shivananda, who has been good enough to give me his precious personal memories of the Master ; to the Master's pious direct disciple and Evangelist, Mahendra Nath Gupta, whose name is modestly concealed behind the simple initial M ; to the young and religious savant, Boshi Sen, a disciple of Sir J. C. Bose and a devotee of Vivekananda, who with her permission communicated to me the unpublished Memoirs of Sister Christine, she who with Sister Nivedita was the most intimate of Vivekananda's Western disciples ; to Miss Josephine MacLeod, who was an active and devoted friend of the great Swami ; above all to the editor of the Review, *Prabuddha Bharata,* Swami Ashokananda, who was never wearied of my unwearied questions, but has answered them with the most precise erudition. It was he who gave me the most complete information with regard to the actual position of the Ramakrishna Mission.

I must also express my gratitude to Mr. Dhan Gopal Mukerji, who first revealed Ramakrishna's existence to me, and to my faithful friend, Dr.

Kalidas Nag, who has more than once advised and instructed me.

May I have made the best use of so many excellent guides for the service of the India which is dear to us and of the human Spirit !

R. R.

December, 1928

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

In bringing out the present volume, we must at the outset tender our grateful thanks to the great author for affording us an opportunity to know what one of the greatest and most representative minds of modern Europe thinks of the Great Masters, Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Such knowledge, in these days of rapidly increasing international co-operation, is, we believe, indispensable for all Indians. We should like to mention that the work was prepared primarily for Western readers, and the subject was conceived and interpreted from a Western point of view. The author's views and interpretations, therefore, have not agreed in toto with those of the Ramakrishna Order. This is only natural; for though a true and complete understanding of the Master and his message requires neither a Western nor an Eastern standpoint, but simply a complete identification of life and mind with his own, every man of every race and nation can accept and benefit by whatever in his life and teaching appeals to his own genius. A many-sided life such as that of Sri Ramakrishna makes different appeals to different persons; but all are worthy of respect for all are true as far as they go.

Situated as the author was at such a great distance from India, and as the literature on which he had to depend almost entirely for his material was written in languages not his own, a few inaccuracies have naturally crept into the book.

But these are for the most part mere matters of detail and do not substantially detract from the brilliance and excellence of the study presented by our author.

We have added a note of our own on Sri Ramakrishna and Keshab Chandra Sen towards the end of the volume and omitted a few footnotes with the approval of M. Rolland.

PUBLISHER

August, 1929

ICONOGRAPHY

There are only three pictures of Ramakrishna which appear to be authentic :

1. One published in the great Biography in English, published by the Advaita Ashrama, (p. 262). Ramakrishna was taken to a photographer and involved in a spiritual conversation in the course of which he fell into the Samadhi. A photograph was then taken, and when Ramakrishna saw it afterwards, he made the remark that it represented an exalted condition of Yoga.

2. One published in Vol. IV of *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda,* p. 150.

3. One which I hope to publish sent to me by Swami Ashokananda. It was taken during a Kirtana (religious dances and songs) in which he was taking part with ecstatic joy.

The portrait in colours reproduced as the frontispiece of the big Biography was painted by an Austrian artist,* but not from the living model. The disciples considered that it was very like him except that it was too highly coloured.

* Frank Dvorak—Publisher

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Sri Ramakrishna

TO MY EASTERN READERS[1]

> "Greeting to the feet of the Jnanin! Greeting to the feet of the Bhakta! Greeting to the devout who believe in the formless God! Greeting to those who believe in God with form! Greeting to the men of old who knew Brahman! Greeting to the modern knowers of Truth. . . ."
>
> (*Ramakrishna, October 28, 1882*)

I must beg my Indian readers to view with indulgence the mistakes I may have made. In spite of all the enthusiasm I have brought to my task, it is impossible for a man of the West to interpret men of Asia with their thousand years' experience of thought; for such an interpretation must often be erroneous. The only thing to which I can testify is (the sincerity which has led me to make a pious attempt to enter into all forms of life.)

At the same time I must confess that (I have not abdicated one iota of my free judgment as a man of the West.) I respect the faith of all and very often I love it. But I never subscribe to it. Ramakrishna lies very near to my heart because I see in him a man and not an "Incarnation" as he appears to his disciples. In accordance with the Vedantists I do not need to enclose God within the bounds of a privileged man in order to admit that the Divine dwells within the soul and that the soul dwells in everything—that Atman is Brahman: for that,

[1] This book is to appear in India and Europe at the same time.

although it knows it not, is a form of nationalism of spirit and I cannot accept it. I see God in all that exists. I see Him as completely in the least fragment as in the whole Cosmos. There is no difference of essence. And power is universally infinite ; that which lies hidden in an atom, if one only knew it, would blow up a whole world. The only difference is that it is more or less concentrated in the heart of a conscience, in an ego, or in a unit of energy, an ion. The very greatest of men is only a clearer reflection of the Sun which gleams in each drop of dew.

That is why I can never make that sacred gulf so pleasing to the devout, between the heroes of the soul and the thousands of their obscure companions past and present. And neither more nor less than I isolate Christ or Buddha, do I isolate Ramakrishna and Vivekananda from the great army of the Spirit marching on in their own time. I shall try in the course of this book to do justice to those personalities of genius, who during the last century have sprung up in reawakened India, reviving the ancient energies of their country and bringing about a springtime of thought within her borders. The work of each one was creative and each one collected round him a band of faithful souls who formed themselves into a church and unconsciously looked upon that church as the temple of the one or of the greatest God.

At this distance from their differences I refuse to see the dust of battle ; at this distance the hedges between the fields melt into an immense expanse. I can only see the same river, a majestic "*chemin qui marche*" (road which marches) in

the words of our Pascal. And it is because Ramakrishna more fully than any other man not only conceived, but realised in himself the total Unity of this river of God, open to all rivers and all streams, that I have given him my love ; and I have drawn a little of his sacred water to slake the great thirst of the world.

But I shall not remain leaning at the edge of the river. I shall continue my march with the stream right to the sea. Leaving behind at each winding of the river where death has cried "Halt!" to one of our leaders the kneeling company of the faithful, I shall go with the stream and pay homage to it from the source to the estuary. Holy is the source, holy is the course, holy is the estuary. And we shall embrace within the river and its tributaries, small and great, and in the Ocean itself—the whole moving mass of the living God.

R. R.

Villeneuve, Christmas, 1928.

TO MY WESTERN READERS

I have dedicated my whole life to the reconciliation of mankind. I have striven to bring it about among the peoples of Europe, especially between those two great Western peoples, who are brethren and yet enemies. For the last ten years I have been attempting the same task for the West and the East. I also desire to reconcile, if it is possible, the two antithetical forms of spirit for which the West and the East are wrongly supposed to stand —reason and faith—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say, the diverse forms of reason and of faith ; for the West and the East share them both almost equally although few suspect it.

In our days an absurd separation has been made between these two halves of the soul, and it is presumed that they are incompatible. The only incompatibility lies in the narrowness of view, which those who erroneously claim to be their representatives, share in common.

On the one hand, those who call themselves religious shut themselves up within the four walls of their chapel, and not only refuse to come out (as they have a right to do), but they would deny to all outside those four walls the right to live, if they could. On the other hand, the free-thinkers, who are for the most part without any religious sense at all (as they have a right to be), too often consider it their mission in life to fight against religious souls and in turn deny their right to exist.

(The result is the futile spectacle of a systematic attempt to destroy religion on the part of men, who do not perceive that they are attacking something which they do not understand.) A discussion of religion based solely on historical or pseudo-historical texts, rendered sterile by time and covered with lichen, is of no avail. As well explain the fact of inner psychological life by the dissection of the physical organs through which it flows. The confusion created by our rationalists between the outward expression and the power of thought seems to me as illusory as the confusion common to the religions of past ages of identifying magic powers with the words, the syllables or the letters whereby they are expressed.

The first qualification for knowing, judging, and if desirable condemning a religion or religions, is to have made experiments for oneself in the fact of religious consciousness. Even those who have followed a religious vocation are not all qualified to speak on the subject; for, if they are sincere, they will recognise that the fact of religious consciousness and the profession of religion are two different things. Many very honourable priests are believers by obedience or from interested or indolent motives, and have either never felt the need of religious experience or have shrunk from gaining it because they lack sufficient strength of character. As against these may be set many souls who are or who believe they are free from all religious belief, but who in reality live immersed in a state of super-rational consciousness, which they term Socialism, Communism, Humanitarianism, Nationalism and even Rational-

ism. It is the quality of thought and not its object which determines its source and allows us to decide whether or not it emanates from religion. If it turns fearlessly towards the search for truth at all costs with single-minded sincerity prepared for any sacrifice, I should call it religious; for it presupposes faith in an end to human effort higher than the life of the individual, at times higher than the life of existing society, and even higher than the life of humanity as a whole. Scepticism itself when it proceeds from vigorous natures true to the core, when it is an expression of strength and not of weakness, joins in the march of the Grand Army of the religious soul.

On the other hand, thousands of cowardly believers, clerical and lay, within the churches have no right to wear the colours of religion. They do not believe because they choose to believe, but wallow in the stable where they were born in front of mangers full of the grain of comfortable beliefs upon which all they have to do is to ruminate.

The tragic words used of Christ—that He will be in agony to the end of the world[1]—are well known. I myself do not believe in one personal God, least of all in a God of Sorrow only. But I believe that in all that exists, including joy and sorrow and with them all forms of life, in mankind, and in men and in the Universe, the only God is He who is a perpetual birth. The creation

[1] Pascal: *Pensees; Le Mystere de Jesus:* "Jesus sera en agonie jusqu'a la fin du monde: il ne faut pas dormir pendant ce temps-la."

takes place anew every instant. Religion is never accomplished. It is ceaseless action and the will to strive—the outpouring of a spring, never a stagnant pond.

I belong to a land of rivers. I love them as if they were living creatures, and I understand why my ancestors offered them oblations of wine and milk. Now of all rivers the most sacred is that which gushes out eternally from the depths of the soul, from its rocks and sands and glaciers. Therein lies primeval Force and that is what I call religion. Everything belongs to this river of the Soul, flowing from the dark unplumbed reservoir of our being down the inevitable slope to the Ocean of the conscious, realised and mastered Being. And just as the water condenses and rises in vapour from the sea to the clouds of the sky to fill again the reservoir of the rivers, the cycles of creation proceed in uninterrupted succession. From the source to the sea, from the sea to the source, everything consists of the same Energy, of the Being without beginning and without end. (It matters not to me whether the Being be called God (and which God?) or Force (and what Force? It may equally be called Matter, but what manner of matter is it when it includes the forces of the Spirit?).) Words, words, nothing but words! Unity, living and not abstract, is the essence of it all. And it is that which I adore, and it is that which the great believers and the great agnostics, who carry it within them consciously or unconsciously alike adore.

*

To her, to the Great Goddess, the invisible, the

immanent, who gathers in her golden arms the multiform, multicoloured sheaf of polyphony—to Unity—I dedicate this new work.

For a century in new India Unity has been the target for the arrows of all archers. Fiery personalities throughout this century have sprung from her sacred earth, a veritable Ganges of peoples and thought. Whatever may be the differences between them, their goal is ever the same—human unity through God. And through all the changes of workmen Unity itself has expanded and gained in precision.

From first to last this great movement has been one of co-operation on a footing of complete equality between the West and the East, between the powers of reason and those—not of faith in the sense of blind acceptance, a sense it has gained in servile ages among exhausted races—but of vital and penetrating intuition : the eye in the forehead of the Cyclops which completes but does not cancel the other two.

From this magnificent procession of spiritual heroes whom we shall survey later[1] I have chosen two men, who have won my regard because with incomparable charm and power they have realised this splendid symphony of the Universal Soul. They are, if one may say so, its Mozart and its Beethoven—*Pater Seraphicus* and Jove the Thunderer—Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.

[1] See Chapter VI of this volume—"The Builders of Unity" (Ram Mohun Roy, Devendranath Tagore, Keshab Chunder Sen, Dayananda). Cf. also *India on the March* (*Revue Europe*, December 15, 1928), where I have found a place for our great contemporary, Aurobindo Ghose.

The subject of this book[1] is threefold and yet one. It comprises the story of two extraordinary lives—one half legendary, the other a veritable epic—unfolded before us in our own time, and the account of a lofty system of thought, at once religious and philosophic, moral and social, with its message for modern humanity from the depths of India's past.

Although (as you will see for yourselves) the pathetic interest, the charming poetry, the grace and Homeric grandeur of these two lives are sufficient to explain why I have spent two years of my own in exploring and tracing their course in order to show them to you, it was not the curiosity of an explorer that prompted me to undertake the journey.

I am no dilettante and I do not bring to jaded readers the opportunity to lose themselves, but rather to find themselves—to find their true selves, naked and without the mask of falsehood. My companions have ever been men with just that object in view, whether living or dead, and the limits of centuries or of races mean little to me. (There is neither East nor West for the naked soul; such things are merely its trappings. The whole world is its home. And as its home is each one of us, it belongs to all of us.)

Perhaps I may be excused if I put myself for a brief space upon the stage in order to explain the source of inner thought that has given birth to this work. I do this only by way of example, for I am not an exceptional man. I am one of the people

[1] In two volumes.

of France. I know that I represent thousands of Westerners, who have neither the means nor the time to express themselves. Whenever one of us speaks from the depths of his heart in order to free his own self, his voice liberates at the same time thousands of silent voices. Then listen, not to my voice, but to the echo of theirs.

I was born and spent the first fourteen years of my life in a part of central France, where my family had been established for centuries. Our line is purely French and Catholic without any foreign admixture. And the early environment wherein I was sealed until my arrival in Paris about 1880 was an old district of the Nivernais where nothing from the outside world was allowed to penetrate within its charmed circle.

So in this closed vase modelled from the clay of Gaul with its flaxen blue sky and its rivers I discovered all the colours of the universe during my childhood. When staff in hand in later years I scoured the roads of thought, I found nothing that was strange in any country. All the aspects of mind that I found or felt were in their origin the same as mine. Outside experience merely brought me the realisation of my own mind, the states of which I had noted but to which I had no key. Neither Shakespeare nor Beethoven nor Tolstoy nor Rome, the masters that nurtured me, ever revealed anything to me except the "Open Sesame" of my subterranean city, my Herculaneum, sleeping under its lava. And I am convinced that it sleeps in the depths of many of those around us. But they are ignorant of its existence just as I was. Few venture beyond the

first stage of excavation, which their own practical common sense has shown them to be necessary for their daily use, and they economise their needs like those masters who forged first the royal and then the Jacobin unity of France. I admire the structure. An historian by profession, I see in it one of the masterpieces of human effort enlightened by the spirit. "*Aere perrenius* . . ."[1] But according to the old legend which demanded that if a work was to endure a living body should be immured in the walls, our master architects have entombed in their mortar thousands of warm human souls. They can no longer be seen beneath the marble facing and the Roman cement. But I can hear them! And whoever listens will hear them as I do under the noble liturgy of "classic" thought. The Mass celebrated on the High Altar takes no heed of them. But the faithful, the docile and inattentive crowd kneeling and standing at the given signal, ruminate in their dreams upon quite different herbs of St. John.[2] France is rich in souls. But she hides them as an old peasant woman hides her money.

I have just rediscovered the key of the lost staircase leading to some of these proscribed souls. The staircase in the wall, spiral like the coils of a serpent, winds from the subterranean depths of the Ego to the high terraces crowned by the stars. But nothing that I saw there was unknown country. I had seen it all before and I knew it well—but I did not know where I had

[1] Horace: "More eternal than the ages."

[2] On the Feast of St. John all kinds of herbs are sold in the fairs, having so-called magic properties.

seen it before. More than once I had recited from memory, though imperfectly, the lesson of thought learned at some former time (but from whom? One of my very ancient selves. . . .). Now I reread it, every word clear and complete, in the book of life held out to me by the illiterate genius who knew all its pages by heart—Ramakrishna.

In my turn I present him to you, not as a new book but as a very old one, which you have all tried to spell out (though many stopped short at the alphabet). Eventually it is always the same book but the writing varies. The eye usually remains fixed on the cover and does not pierce to the kernel.

It is always the same Book. It is always the same Man—the Son of Man, the Eternal, Our Son, Our God reborn. With each return he reveals himself a little more fully, and more enriched by the universe.

Allowing for differences of country and of time Ramakrishna is the younger brother of our Christ.

We can show, if we choose, and as free-thinking exegesists are trying to do to-day, that the whole doctrine of Christ was current before him in the Oriental soul seminated by the thinkers of Chaldea, Egypt, Athens and Ionia. But we can never stop the person of Christ, whether real or legendary (they are merely two orders of the same reality[1]), from prevailing, and rightly so, in

[1] The attitude of religious Indians with regard to legend is a curious and critical one akin to faith. It is very remarkable that the *historic* existence of the personalities they worship as Gods is almost a matter of indifference—

the history of mankind over the personality of a Plato. It is a monumental and necessary creation of the Soul of humanity. It is its most beautiful fruit belonging to one of its autumns. The same tree has produced, according to the same law of nature, the life and the legend. They are both made of the same living body and are the emanation of its look, its breath and its moisture.

I am bringing to Europe, as yet unaware of it, the fruit of a new autumn, a new message of the Soul, the symphony of India, bearing the name of Ramakrishna. It can be shown (and we shall not fail to point out) that this symphony, like those of our classical masters, is built up of a hundred different musical elements emanating from the past. But the sovereign personality concentrating in himself the diversity of these elements and fashioning them into a royal harmony, is always the one who gives his name to the work, though it contains within itself the

at all events quite secondary. So long as they are *spiritually* true, their objective reality matters little. Ramakrishna, the greatest of believers, said: "Those who have been able to conceive of such ideas, ought to be able to be those ideas themselves." And Vivekananda who doubted the objective existence of Krishna and also of Christ (more than that of Christ), declared:

"But to-day Krishna is the most perfect of the Avatars."

And he worshipped him. (*Cf.* Sister Nivedita: *Notes of some Wanderings with the Swami Vivekananda*).

Truly religious souls recognise the living God just as much in the stamp with which He has marked the brains of a people as in the reality of an Incarnation. They are two equal realities in the eyes of a great believer, for whom everything that is real is God. And he can never quite make up his mind which of the two is the more imposing—the creation of a people or the creation of an age.

labour of generations. And with his victorious sign he marks a new era.

The man whose image I here evoke was the consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of three hundred million people. Although he has been dead forty years,[1] his soul animates modern India. He was no hero of action like Gandhi, no genius in art or thought like Goethe or Tagore. He was a little village Brahmin of Bengal, whose outer life was set in a limited frame without striking incident, outside the political and social activities of his time.[2] But his inner life embraced the whole multiplicity of men and Gods. It was a part of the very source of Energy, the Divine Shakti, of whom Vidyapati,[3] the old poet of Mithila, and Ramprasad of Bengal sing.

Very few go back to the source. The little peasant of Bengal by listening to the message of his heart found his way to the inner Sea. And there he was wedded to it, thus bearing out the words of the Upanishads :[4]

[1] In 1886. He was fifty years old. His great disciple, Vivekananda, died in 1902 at the age of thirty-nine. It should never be forgotten how recently they lived. We have seen the same suns, and the same raft of time has borne us.

[2] The life of Vivekananda was quite different, for he traversed the Old and the New Worlds.

[3] " Show Thyself, O Goddess with the thick tresses ! . . . Thou art one and many, Thou containest the thousands and Thou fillest the field of battle with the enemy ! . . . ." (Hymn to the Goddess of Energy, Shakti.)

[4] *Taittiriya Upanishad.*

According to the Vedanta, when Brahman the Absolute became endowed with qualities and began to evolve the

"I am more ancient than the radiant Gods. I am the first-born of the Being. I am the artery of Immortality."

It is my desire to bring the sound of the beating of that artery to the ears of fever-stricken Europe, which has murdered sleep. I wish to wet its lips with the blood of Immortality.

R. R.

Christmas, 1928

living universe, He became Himself the first evolute, the first-born of Being, which is the Essence of all things visible and invisible. He who speaks thus is supposed to have attained complete identity with Him.

THE LIFE OF RAMAKRISHNA

THE LIFE OF RAMAKRISHNA

PRELUDE

I shall begin my story as if it were a fable. But it is an extraordinary fact that this ancient legend, belonging apparently to the realm of mythology, is in reality the account of men who were living yesterday, our neighbours in the "century", and that people alive to-day have seen them with their own eyes.[1] I have received glowing testimony at their hands. I have talked with some among them, who were the companions of this mystic being—of the Man-Gods[2]—and I can vouch for their loyalty. Moreover, these eye-witnesses are not the simple fishermen of the Gospel story ; some are great thinkers, learned in European thought and disciplined in its strict school. And yet they speak as men of three thousand years ago.

The co-existence in one and the same brain in

[1] At the date when this book was being written (the autumn of 1928) the following direct disciples and eye-witnesses of Ramakrishna were still living :

Swami Shivananda, the Abbot of the central Math (monastery) at Belur near Calcutta and the President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission ; Swami Abhedananda ; Swami Akhandananda ; Swami Subodhananda ; Swami Vijnanananda ; Mahendra Nath Gupta, editor of Discourses with the Master under the title *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna ;* Ramlal Chatterji, Ramakrishna's nephew, not to mention more lay disciples, whom it is difficult to trace.

[2] The plural is used to indicate that Ramakrishna was (or was believed to be) the incarnation not only of the Divine Essence, but of the other Gods.—*Translator.*

this our twentieth century of scientific reason and the visionary spirit of ancient times, when as in the Greek age, gods and goddesses shared the bed and the board of mortal man, or as in the age of Galilee, when against the pale summer sky the heavenly winged messenger was seen bringing the Annunciation to a Virgin, who bent meekly under the gift—this is what our wise men cannot imagine ; they are no longer mad enough. And indeed therein lies the real miracle, the richness of this world that they do not know how to enjoy. The majority of European thinkers shut themselves up on their own particular floor of the house of mankind ; and although this floor may be stored with libraries containing the history of the other floors inhabited in the past, the rest of the house seems to them to be uninhabited, and they never hear from the floors above or below them the footsteps of their neighbours. In the concert of the world the orchestra is made up of all the centuries past and present, and they all play at the same time ; but each has his eyes fixed upon his own stand and on the conductor's baton ; he hears nothing but his own instrument.

But let us listen to the whole splendid harmony of the present, wherein the past dreams and the future aspirations of all races and all ages are blended. For those who have ears to hear every second contains the song of humanity from the first born to the last to die, unfolding like jasmine round the wheel of the ages. There is no need to decipher papyrus in order to trace the road traversed by the thoughts of men. The thoughts of a thousand years are all around us. Nothing

is obliterated. Listen! but listen with your ears. Let books be silent! They talk too much. . . .

(If there is one place on the face of the earth where all the dreams of living men have found a home from the very earliest days when man began the dream of existence, it is India. Her unique privilege, as Barth[1] has shown with great clearness, has been that of a great elder sister, whose spiritual development, an autonomous flower continuously growing throughout the Methuselah-long life of the peoples, has never been interrupted. For more than thirty centuries the tree of Vision, with all its thousand branches and their millions of twigs, has sprung from that torrid land, the burning womb of the gods. It renews itself tirelessly, showing no signs of decay; all kinds of fruit ripen upon its boughs at the same time; side by side are found all kinds of gods from the most savage to the highest—to the formless God, the Unnamable, the Boundless One. . . . Always the same tree.)

And the substance and thought of its interlaced branches, through which the same sap runs, have been so closely knit together, that from root to topmost twig the whole tree is vibrant, like the mast of the great ship of the Earth, and it sings one great symphony, composed of the thousand voices and the thousand faiths of mankind. Its polyphony, discordant and confused at first to unaccustomed ears, discovers to the trained ear its secret hierarchy and great hidden form. Moreover, those who have once heard it can no longer

[1] A. Barth: *The Religions of India*, 1879.

be satisfied with the rude and artificial order imposed amid desolation by Western reason and its faith or faiths, all equally tyrannical and mutually contradictory. What doth it profit a man to reign over a world for the most part enslaved, debased or destroyed? Better to reign over life, comprehended, reverenced and embraced as one great whole, wherein he must learn to co-ordinate its opposing forces in an exact equilibrium.

This is the supreme knowledge we can learn from "Universe Souls", and it is some beautiful examples of such souls that I wish to depict. The secret of their mastery and their serenity is not that of the "lilies of the field, arrayed in glory, who toil not, neither do they spin." They weave the clothes for those who go naked. They have spun the thread of Ariadne to guide us through the mazes of the labyrinth. We have only to hold the length of their thread in our hands to find the right path, the path, which rises from the vast morasses of the soul inhabited by primitive gods stuck fast in the mire, to the peaks crowned by the outspread wings of heaven —Τιτὰν αἰθήρ [1]—the intangible Spirit.

And in the life of Ramakrishna, the Man-Gods, I am about to relate the life of this Jacob's ladder, whereon the twofold unbroken line of the Divine in man ascends and descends between heaven and earth.

[1] Empedocles: "the Titan Ether."

I

THE GOSPEL OF CHILDHOOD[1]

At Kamarpukur, one of the conical villages of Bengal, set in the midst of palm trees, pools and rice fields, lived an old orthodox Brahmin couple, called Chattopadhyaya. They were very poor and very pious, devotees of the cult of the heroic and virtuous Rama. The father, a man as upright as the men of old, had been despoiled of all he possessed, because he had refused to bear false witness to the advantage of the great landowner, who was his neighbour. He received a visitation

[1] *Note.*—I must warn my European readers that in describing this childhood, I have abstained from using my critical faculties (though they keep watch on the threshold). I have become simply the voice of the legend, the flute under the fingers of Krishna. For the present we need not concern ourselves with the objective reality of facts, but only with the subjective reality of living impressions. To undo the web of Penelope is an idle task. I am concerned rather with the dream fashioned under the fingers of a good workman. A great master of learning has set us an example in this. Max Muller, a faithful adherent of the critical methods of the West, and at the same time a respecter of other forms of thought, took down from the lips of Vivekananda an account of the life of the Paramahamsa and faithfully reproduced it in his precious little book.* For he maintained that what he calls the "dialogic or dialectic process," used to describe events seen and experienced by contemporaries, a process, which is a kind of inversion of reality by credible and live witnesses, is one of the indispensable elements of history. All knowledge of reality is an inversion through the mind and the senses. Hence all sincere inversion is reality. Critical reason must later evaluate the degree and angle of the vision, and must always take into account the reflection given in the distorting mirror of the mind.

* Max Muller : *Ramakrishna, His Life and Sayings*, 1898.

from the Gods. Although he was then sixty years of age he went on a pilgrimage to Gaya, where is an imprint of the foot of the Lord Vishnu.[1] The Lord appeared to him during the night, and said : "I am about to be reborn for the salvation of the world."

About the same time in Kamarpukur his wife, Chandramani, dreamt that she had been possessed by a God. In the temple opposite her cottage the divine image of Shiva quickened to life under her eyes. A ray of light penetrated to the depths of her being. Under the storm Chandramani was overthrown and fainted. When the prey of the God came to herself, she had conceived. Her husband on his return found her transfigured. She heard voices ; she carried a God.[2]

The child, whom the world was to know as Ramakrishna, was born on February 18, 1836. But the gay name with the tripping cadences of a bell, that he bore in childhood, was Gadadhar. He was a little boy full of fun and life, mischievous and charming, with a feminine grace he preserved to the end of his life. Nobody imagined—himself least of all—what infinite spaces, what tremendous depths lay hidden in the little body of this laughing child. They were revealed to him when he was six years old. One day in June or July (1842) he was sauntering along with a meal, as small as a bird's, of a little puffed rice carried in a fold of his garment. He was going to the fields.

[1] Buddha is now regarded by the people as one of the numerous Incarnations of Vishnu.

[2] Indian legends tell of more than one Immaculate Conception.

"I was following a narrow path between the rice fields. I raised my eyes to the sky as I munched my rice. I saw a great black cloud spreading rapidly until it covered the heavens. Suddenly at the edge of the cloud a flight of snow-white cranes passed over my head. The contrast was so beautiful that my spirit wandered far away. I lost consciousness and fell to the ground. The puffed rice was scattered. Somebody picked me up and carried me home in his arms. An access of joy and emotion overcame me. . . . This was the first time that I was seized with ecstasy."

He was destined thus to pass half his life.

Even in this first ecstasy the real character of the divine impress on the soul of this child can be seen. Artistic emotion, a passionate instinct for the beautiful, was the first channel bringing him into contact with God. There are—as we shall see—many other paths along which revelation may come, either love of a dear one, or thought, or self-mastery, or honest and disinterested labour, or compassion or meditation. He came to know them all, but the most immediate and natural with him was delight in the beautiful face of God, which he saw in all that he looked upon. He was a born artist. In this how greatly he differs from that other great soul, the Mahatma of India, whose European evangelist I have already become —Gandhi, the man without art, the man without visions, who does not even desire them, who mistrusts them rather—the man who lives in God through reasoned action, as is inevitable in a born leader of the people. The path of Ramakrishna is a far more dangerous one, but it leads further;

from the precipices skirted by it limitless horizons open out. It is the way of love.

It is the way made peculiarly their own by his Bengal countrymen, a race of artists and lover-poets. Its inspired guide had been the ecstatic lover of Krishna, Chaitanya, and its most exquisite music the delicious songs of Chandidas and Vidyapati.[1] These seraphic masters, the scented flowers of their soil, have impregnated it with their

[1] Chaitanya (1485-1533), the descendant of a family of Bengal Brahmins, after having achieved a great reputation as a theological and Sanskrit scholar, shook off the dust of the old religion with its paralysing formalism. He went out into the highways to preach a new gospel of love founded on mystic union with God. It was open to all men and women of all religions and all castes as brothers, and even to those without caste ; Mussulmans, Hindus, beggars, pariahs, thieves, prostitutes, all came together to listen to his burning message and went away purified and strengthened.

An extraordinary "Awakening" was heralded during the course of a century by the songs of a series of wonderful poets. The most exquisite of these singers was Chandidas, the poor priest of a ruined temple in Bengal, the lover of a young peasant girl, whom he hymned in mystic form in a number of immortal little poems. Nothing in the treasury of our European *lieder* can surpass the touching beauty of these divine elegies. Vidyapati, the aristocrat, whose inspiration was a Queen, attained by refined art to the natural perfection of the simple Chandidas, but his key is a more joyful one. (My earnest desire is to see some real Western poet transplanting these songs into our rose garden. There they would bloom afresh in every loving heart).

Chaitanya's disciples spread throughout Bengal. They went from village to village, singing and dancing to a new form of music called Kirtana, the wandering Bride, the Human Soul, seeking the Divine Love. The Ganges boatmen and the peasants took up this dream of the Awakened Sleeper, and his melodious echoes still fill the sovereign art of Tagore, especially in the *Gardener* and the *Gitanjali*. The feet of the child Ramakrishna moved to the rhythm of these Kirtanas. He drank the milk of this Vaishnavite music, and it is true

fragrance so that Bengal has been intoxicated with it for centuries. The soul of the little Ramakrishna was made of the same substance ; it was flesh of their flesh, and he was looked upon as a flowering branch of the tree of Chiatanya.[1]

The lover of divine beauty, the artistic genius as yet unaware of itself, appears again in a later ecstasy. One night during the festival of Shiva this child of eight years old, a passionate lover of music and poetry, a skilful modeller of images and the leader of a small dramatic troupe of boys of his own age, was taking the part of Shiva in the sacred representation ; suddenly his being was possessed by his hero, tears of joy coursed down his little cheeks ; he lost himself in the glory of God ; he was transported like Ganymede by the Eagle carrying the thunderbolt—he was thought to be dead. . . .

From that time the ecstasies became more frequent. In Europe the case would have been foredoomed and the child would have been placed

to say that he himself became its masterpiece, his own life its most beautiful poem.

[1] A letter from Ramakrishna's learned disciple, the author of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,* Mahendra Nath Gupta, has cleared up certain points with regard to this question :

Ramakrishna knew the great Vaishnavite poets, but it appears that his knowledge was gleaned mainly from popular adaptations used in the performances of the native theatres, called jatras, such as the one wherein as a child he played the part of Shiva. He was inspired by Chaitanya especially after 1858, and ended by indentifying himself with him. In one of his first interviews with the young Naren (Vivekananda) he scandalised the young man by saying to him that he had been Chaitanya in a previous Incarnation. He did a great deal to revive Chaitanya's mystic meaning, which had been forgotten in Bengal.

in a lunatic asylum under a daily douche of psycho-therapy. Conscientiously day by day the flame would have been quenched. The magic lantern would have been no more! "The candle is dead."[1] Sometimes the child also dies. Even in India where the centuries have seen a constant procession of such magic lanterns, anxiety was felt, and his father and mother, although accustomed to the visitation of Gods, regarded the child's transports with fear. But apart from these crises, he enjoyed perfect health and was not at all supernormal in spite of his many gifts. His ingenious fingers fashioned gods from clay, the heroic legends blossomed in his mind; he sang divinely the pastoral airs of Sri Krishna; and sometimes his precocious intellect took part in the discussions of learned men, whom he astonished as Jesus had astonished the Jewish doctors. But this boy with his clear skin, beautiful flowing locks, attractive smile, charming voice and independent spirit, who played truant from school and who lived as free as air, remained a child to the end of his life, like the little Mozart. Until he was thirteen he was adored and petted by the women and girls. They recognised in him something of their own femininity; for he had so far assimilated their nature that one of his childish dreams, cradled as he was in the legend of Krishna and the Gopis, was to be reborn as a little widow, a lover of Krishna, who would be visited by him in her home. This was but one of the innumerable incarnations he imagined. Instinctively this Protean

[1] Allusion to the well-known French folksong: "*Au clair de la lune.*"

soul took on instantly each of the beings whom he saw or imagined. No man is entirely void of this magic plasticity. One of its inferior manifestations is that of a mimic, who copies attitudes and facial expressions ; its highest (if such an expression may be used) is that of the God who plays for Himself the Comedy of the Universe. It is always the sign of art and of love. Thus was foreshadowed the marvellous power manifested later by Ramakrishna, a genius for espousing all the souls in the world.

*

His father died when he was seven years old. The next few years were difficult ones for the family, for they had no resources. The eldest son, Ramkumar,[1] went to Calcutta and opened a school there. He sent for his younger brother, now an adolescent, in 1852, but the latter, filled with the urge of his inner life and quite undisciplined, refused to learn.

At that time there was a rich woman, named Rani Rasmani, belonging to an inferior caste. At Dakshineswar, on the eastern bank of the Ganges, some four miles from Calcutta, she founded a temple to the Great Goddess, the Divine Mother, Kali. She had considerable difficulty in finding a Brahmin to serve as its priest. Strangely enough religious India with its veneration for monks, Sadhus, and seers, has little respect for the paid office of priest. The temples are not, as in Europe, the body and the heart of God,

[1] Ramakrishna was the fourth of five children.

the shrines of His daily renewed sacrifice. They are the praiseworthy foundations of the rich, who hope thereby to gain credit with the Divinity. True religion is a private affair ; its temple is each individual soul. In this case, moreover, the founder of the temple was a Sudra, an additional disqualification for any Brahmin who undertook the charge. Ramkumar resigned himself to it in 1855 ; but his young brother, who was very strict in all questions relating to caste, was only reconciled to the idea with very great difficulty. Little by little, however, his repugnance was overcome, and when in the following year his eldest brother died, Ramakrishna decided to take his place.

II

KALI THE MOTHER

THE young priest of Kali was twenty years old. He did not know what a terrible mistress he had elected to serve. As a purring tigress that fascinates her prey, She was to feed upon him, playing with him for ten long enchanted years passed beneath Her gleaming pupils. He lived in the temple alone with Her, but at the centre of a whirling cyclone. For the burning breath of a crowd of visionaries blew like the monsoon its eddies of dust through the door of the temple. Thither came countless pilgrims, monks, Sadhus, fakirs, Hindus and Mussulmans—a congregation of the madmen of God.[1]

The temple was a vast building with five domes crowned with spires. It was reached by an open terrace above the Ganges between a double row of twelve small domed temples to Shiva. On the other side of a great rectangular paved court another vast temple to Krishna and Radha arose next to that of Kali.[2] The whole symbolic world

[1] There were the madmen of the Book, controlled by the single word, *OM*. There were those who danced and were convulsed with laughter, crying Bravo to the Illusion of the world. There were naked men living with the dogs on beggars' scraps, who no longer distinguished between one form and another and were attached to nothing. There were the mystic and drunken bands of Tantrikas. Young Ramakrishna observed them all (he was to describe them later, not without humour) with a watchful and anxious eye, and a mixture of repulsion and fascination. (*Cf. Life of Sri Ramakrishna*).

[2] The temple is still in existence. Ramakrishna's room at

was represented—the Trinity of the Nature Mother (Kali), the Absolute (Shiva), and Love (Radhakanta: Krishna, Radha), the Arch spanning heaven and earth. But Kali was the sovereign deity.

Within the temple She dwelt, a basalt figure, dressed in sumptuous Benares tissue, the Queen of the world and of the Gods. She was dancing upon the outstretched body of Shiva. In Her two arms on the left She held a sword and a severed head, on the right She offered gifts and beckoned: "Come! Fear not! . . ." She was Nature, the destroyer and the creator. Nay, She was something greater still for those who had ears to hear. She was the Universal Mother, "my Mother, the all-powerful, who reveals Herself to Her children under different aspects and Divine Incarnations," the visible God, who leads the elect to the invisible God, "and if it so please Her, She takes away the last trace of the ego from all created beings and absorbs it into the consciousness of the Absolute, the undifferentiated God. By Her grace the finite ego loses itself in the illimitable Ego—Atman—Brahman."[1]

the north-west corner of the court, adjacent to the series of the twelve temples of Shiva, has a semi-circular verandah, its roof supported by columns, looking on to the Ganges on the west. A great hall for music and sacred representations opened onto the great court. On either side there were guest rooms, with kitchens for visitors and for the Gods. To the west lay a beautiful shady garden and two ponds on the north and the east. It was carefully cultivated and full of flowers and scents. Beyond the garden can be seen the group of five sacred trees, planted at the desire of Ramakrishna. They became famous under the name of the Panchavati. There he spent his days in meditation and prayer to the Mother. Below murmured the Ganges.

[1] Ramakrishna

But the young priest of twenty was still far from reaching the core where all reality was fused—even by the indirect ways of the intellect. The only reality, Divine or human, accessible to him as yet, was that which he could see, hear and touch. In this he was no different from the majority of his people. That which is most striking to European believers, to Protestant Christians even more than to Catholic, is the intense concreteness of religious vision experienced by Indian believers. When later Vivekananda asked Ramakrshna :

"Have you seen God ?"

he replied :

"I see Him, as I see you, only far more intensely," meaning not in the impersonal and abstract sense, although he practised that as well.

And it is by no means the privilege of a few inspired persons. Every sincere Hindu devotee attains this point with ease, so overflowing and so fresh is the source of creative life in them even today. One of our friends went to the temple with a young princess of Nepal, a beautiful, intelligent and educated girl. She left her to pray for a long time in the intoxicating silence of the incense-filled dimness, lighted only with a single lamp. When the young princess came out, she said to her, very quietly :

"I have seen Rama. . . ."

How then could Ramakrishna have escaped seeing "the Mother with the dark blue skin"? She, the Visible One, was the Incarnation of the forces of Nature and of the Divine in the form of a woman, who has intercourse with mortal men—

Kali. Within Her temple She enveloped him in the scent of Her body, wound him in Her arms and entangled him in Her hair. She was no lay figure with a fixed smile, whose food consisted of litanies. She lived, breathed, arose from Her couch, ate, walked, lay down again. The service of the temple docilely followed the rhythm of Her days. Every morning at dawn the peals of little bells chimed, the lights were swung. In the music room the flutes played the sacred hymn to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals. The Mother awoke. From the garden, embowered in jasmine and roses, garlands were gathered for Her adornment. At nine in the morning music summoned to worship and to it came the Mother. At noon She was escorted to rest on Her silver bed during the heat of the day to the strains of more music.[1] It greeted Her at six in the evening when She reappeared. It played again to the accompaniment of brandished torches at sundown for evening worship ; and conches sounded and little bells tinkled ceaselessly, until finally at nine in the evening it heralded the hour for repose when the Mother slept.

And the priest was associated with all the intimate acts of the day. He dressed and undressed Her, he offered Her flowers and food. He was one of the attendants when the Queen arose and went to bed. How could his hands, his eyes, his heart be otherwise than gradually impregnated with Her flesh ? The very first touch left the sting of Kali in his fingers and united them for ever.

But after She had left Her sting in him She fled,

[1] At the north-west corner of the temple.

and withheld Herself from him. Having pierced him with Her love, the Wasp had concealed Herself in Her stone sheath, and all his efforts failed to bring Her to live again. Passion for the dumb Goddess consumed him. To touch Her, to embrace Her, to win one sign of life from Her, one look, one sigh, one smile, became the sole object of his existence. He flung himself down in the wild jungle-like part of the garden, meditating and praying. He tore off all his clothes, even to the sacred cord, which no Brahmin ever lays aside; but love for the Mother had revealed to him that no man can contemplate God unless he has shed all his prejudices. Like a lost child in tears he besought the Mother to show Herself to him. Every day spent in vain effort increased his distraction, and he lost all control over himself. In despair he writhed on the ground in front of visitors, and became an object of pity, of mockery, even of scandal; but he cared for none of these things. Only one thing mattered. He knew that he was on the verge of extreme happiness—nothing but a thin partition, which he was, nevertheless, powerless to break down, separated him from it. He knew nothing of the science of directed ecstasy, as minutely noted and codified by religious India for centuries past with all the minutiae of a double Faculty of Medicine and Theology; and so he wandered haphazard driven by a blind delirium. As his exaltation was entirely undirected, he ran considerable danger of extinction. Death lies in wait for the imprudent Yogin, whose path traverses the very edge of the abyss. He is described by those who saw him in

those days of bewilderment as having face and breast reddened by the afflux of blood, his eyes filled with tears and his body shaken with spasms. He was at the limit of physical endurance. When such a point has been reached, there is nothing but descent into the darkness of apoplexy—or vision.

The partition was suddenly removed and he saw!

Let him speak for himself.[1] His voice rings in our ears with the accents of our own "madmen of God," our great seers of Europe:

"One day I was torn with intolerable anguish. My heart seemed to be wrung as a damp cloth might be wrung. . . . I was racked with pain. A terrible frenzy seized me at the thought that I might never be granted the blessing of this Divine vision. I thought if that were so, then enough of this life! A sword was hanging in the sanctuary of Kali. My eyes fell upon it and an idea flashed through my brain like a flash of lightning. 'The sword! It will help me to end it.' I rushed up to it, and seized it like a madman. . . . And lo! the whole scene, doors, windows, the temple itself vanished. . . . It seemed as if nothing existed any more. Instead I saw an ocean of the Spirit, boundless, dazzling. In whatever direction I turned great luminous waves were rising. They bore down upon me with a loud roar, as if to swallow me up. In an instant they were upon me. They broke over me, they engulfed me. I was

[1] For this description I have used three separate accounts given by Ramakrishna himself. They all tell the same story, but each enriches the others with several details.

suffocated. I lost consciousness[1] and I fell. . . . How I passed that day and the next I know not. Round me rolled an ocean of ineffable joy. And in the depths of my being I was conscious of the presence of the Divine Mother."[2]

It is noticeable that in this beautiful description there is no mention of the Divine Mother until the end ; She was merged in the Ocean. The disciples who afterwards quoted his exact words, asked him whether he had really seen the Divine form. "He did not say, but on coming to himself from his ecstasy he murmured in a plaintive tone : 'Mother ! . . . Mother !'"

My own view, if I may be pardoned the presumption, is that he *saw* nothing, but that he was *aware* of Her all-permeating presence. He called the Ocean by Her name. His experience was like a dream, to give a lesser example, wherein without the slightest feeling of incongruity, the mind attaches the name of the being filling its thoughts to quite a different form ; the object of our love is in everything ; all forms are but its cloak. On the shores of that sea which rolled down upon Ramakrishna, I see immediately the form of St. Theresa of Avila. She also felt her-

[1] The exact text reads : "I lost all *natural* consciousness." This detail is important, for the rest of the story shows that a higher consciousness, that of the inner world, was on the other hand most keenly perceptive.

[2] *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master,* Vol. II, by Swami Saradananda, published by the Ramakrishna Math of Mylapore, Madras, 1920. Saradananda, who died in 1927, was on terms of intimacy with Ramakrishna and likewise possessed one of the loftiest religious and philosophical minds in India. His biography, unfortunately unfinished, is at once the most interesting and the most reliable.

self engulfed in the infinite until the scruples of her Christian faith and the stern admonitions of her watchful directors led her against her own convictions to confine God within the form of the Son of Man.[1]

But Ramakrishna the lover had not to struggle against the bent of his heart. On the contrary it led him from the formless to the form of his Beloved. He wished it so; for once he had seen and possessed it for an instant, he could not live without it. From that day onward he would have ceased to exist if he had not constantly renewed the fiery vision. Without it the world

[1] It was also a moment of extreme lassitude that Theresa perceived, like a sudden inflooding, the invasion of the Invisible; just such a sea engulfed her. Later on the hard scruples of Salcedo and Gaspard Daza forced her, at the cost of considerable suffering, to confine the Infinite within the finite bounds of the body of Christ.

Further, the ecstasy in Ramakrishna's case followed the normal course of such revelations, as was only natural. *Cf.* the full collection of documents, gathered together by Starbuck under the title *The Psychology of Religion,* a collection used by William James. Almost always it comes about that when effort has been exhausted the spirit attains through anguish. The despair crushing the old self is the door leading to the new.

Again it is a remarkable fact that the great vision often manifests itself through "photisms" (luminous phenomena) and by an oceanic flood. *Cf.* William James: *Varieties of Religious Experience,* giving the beautiful account of President Finney's vision:

"Indeed it seemed to come in waves and waves of liquid love. . . . These waves came over me, and over me, and over me, one after the other, until I recollect, I cried out, 'I shall die if these waves continue to pass over me.' I said, 'Lord, I cannot bear any more;' yet I had no fear of death."

Cf. also the magnificent account of the great mystic as observed and described by Th. Flournoy.

was dead, and living men as nothing but vain shadows, painted figures upon a screen.

But nobody faces the illimitable with impunity. The shock of the first encounter was so violent that his whole being remained in a shuddering state. He only saw those around him through a veil of drifting mist, of dissolving waves of silver shot with sparks of fire. He could no longer control his eyes, his body, or his mind; another will guided them, and he passed through some terrible hours. He prayed the Mother to come to his aid.

Then suddenly he understood. He was possessed by the Mother. He ceased to resist. "*Fiat voluntas tua!* . . . ." She filled him. And out of the mists little by little the material form of the Goddess emerged, first a hand, then Her breath, Her voice, finally Her whole person. Here is one of the marvellous visions of the poet, among a hundred others:

It was evening. The rites were over for the day. The Mother was supposed to be asleep, and he had returned to his room outside the temple above the Ganges. But he could not sleep. He listened. . . . He heard Her get up; She went up to the upper storey of the temple with the joy of a young girl. As She walked the rings of Her anklets rang. He wondered if he were dreaming. His heart hammered in his breast. He went out into the court and raised his head. There he saw Her with unbound hair on the balcony of the first floor, watching the Ganges flow through the beautiful night down to the distant lights of Calcutta. . . .

From that moment his days and nights were passed in the continual presence of his Beloved.

Their intercourse was uninterrupted like the flow of the river. Eventually he was identified with Her, and gradually the radiance of his inner vision became outwardly manifest. Other people seeing him, saw what he saw. Through his body as through a window appeared the bodies of the Gods. Mathur Babu, the son-in-law of the foundress of the temple and the master of the place, was sitting one day in his room opposite Ramakrishna's. Unobserved he watched him pacing up and down upon his balcony. Suddenly he uttered a cry, for he saw him alternately in the form of Shiva as he walked in one direction, and of the Mother as he turned and walked in the opposite direction.

To most people his madness of love was a crying scandal. He was no longer capable of performing the temple rites. In the midst of the ritual acts he was seized with fits of unconsciousness, sudden collapses and petrifactions, when he lost the control of the use of his joints and stiffened into a statue. At other times he permitted himself the strangest familiarities with the Goddess.[1] His functions remained in a state of suspension. He never closed his eyes. He no longer ate. If a nephew who was present had not looked after his most pressing needs, he would have died. Such a

[1] He no longer showed any consideration for his patrons, whose exemplary fidelity consistently defended him against all attack. One day when the rich devotee, the foundress, Rani Rasmani, was praying with her mind elsewhere, Ramakrishna discerned the frivolous objects passing through her thoughts and publicly rebuked her. Those present were greatly excited, but Rasmani herself remained calm. She nobly considered that it was the Mother who had rebuked her

condition brought those evils in its train, from which our Western visionaries have also suffered. Minute drops of blood oozed through his skin. His whole body seemed on fire. His spirit was a furnace whose leaping flames were the Gods. After a period when he saw the Gods in the persons about him (in a prostitute he saw Sita; in a young Englishman standing upright cross-legged against a tree, he saw Krishna), he became the Gods himself. He *was* Kali, he *was* Rama, he *was* Radha, the lover of Krishna,[1] he *was* Sita, he *was* the great monkey, Hanuman.[2] Without insisting on detail, I have no intention of passing lightly over these deliriums of a soul with neither check nor pilot, given over to the furious waves of his passion, to the insatiable voracity of a wolf, ravening for the Gods. Later they had their revenge and preyed upon him in their turn. I have no intention of deceiving my Western reader. He is at liberty, just as I was myself,[3] to judge

[1] Later he was the Gopi (milkmaid), Krishna's lover, for six months.

[2] The process of these realisations is interesting. He became the person of Rama by stages, through the people who served Rama, beginning with the humblest, Hanuman. Then in reward, as he himself believed, Sita appeared to him. This was his first complete vision with his eyes open. All his succeeding visions came by the same successive stages. First he saw the figures *outside himself*, then they *vanished within himself*, finally he *became them himself*. This ardent creative act is striking, but was natural to one of his astounding plastic genius. As soon as he visualised a thought, his vision became incarnate. Imagine living within the innermost being of a Shakespeare while he was producing a film!

[3] I will not deny the fact that when I had reached this point in my researches, I shut up the book. Probably I should not have opened it again for a long time, if I had

whether the madman of God ought to have been put in a strait jacket or not. We have good ground for such an opinion, for even in India men of the greatest sanctity held that view when they saw him. At the time he submitted patiently to be examined by doctors and followed their vain prescriptions, and later, when he looked back over the past and sounded the depths of the abyss from which he had escaped, he himself could not understand why his reason, and even life itself, had not foundered.

But the extraordinary thing for us, and the only thing that matters, is that, instead of foundering they rounded the Cape of Storms victoriously. Nay, this period of hallucination appears to have been a necessary stage, whence his spirit was to rise in the fullness of joyous and harmonious power to mighty realisations for the benefit of humanity. Here is a subject of research tempting to great physicians both of the body and of the mind. There is no difficulty in proving the apparent destruction of his whole mental structure, and the disintegration of its elements. But how were they reassembled into a synthetic entity of the highest order ? How was this ruined building restored to a still greater edifice and by nothing but will-power ? As we shall see by the sequel, Ramakrishna became master alike of his madness and of his reason, of Gods and of men. At times he would open the flood-gates of the deeps of his soul, at others he would conduct with his disciples smiling dialogues, in the manner of a modern

not known by certain indications what heights of wisdom he was to attain in the later years of his life.

Socrates, full of ironic wisdom and penetrating good sense.

But in 1858, at the time of the facts related here, Ramakrishna had not yet achieved the mastery. He had still a long way to go. And if I have anticipated somewhat the end of his life, I have done so to warn the European reader against his first judgment, which was also my own. Patience! The ways of the spirit are disconcerting. Let us await the end!

*

In truth at this period the tramp of God went about like a blind man with closed eyes and without a guide. Instead of keeping to the path, he forced his way through the briers of the hedges and fell into the ditches. Nevertheless he advanced; each time that he fell he picked himself up again and went on his way.

Do not imagine that he was proud or obstinate. He was the most simple of men. If you had told him that his condition was a disease, he would have asked you to prescribe a remedy, and he would not have refused to try any cure.

For a time he was sent back to his home at Kamarpukur. His mother wished him to be married, hoping that marriage would cure him of his divine enchantment. He made no demur; indeed, he showed an innocent pleasure at the thought. But what a strange marriage it was, not much more real (less real, indeed, in spirit) than his union with the Goddess! His bride (1859) was a child of five years old. I feel, as I write, what a shock this will be to my Western reader. I do not wish to spare him. Child-

marriage is an Indian custom, and one which has most often roused the indignation of Europe and America. The virtuous Miss Mayo has recently raised its flag, though rather a tattered one ; for the best minds of India, the Brahmo Samaj, Tagore, Gandhi,[1] have for long condemned the practice, although it is usually more a formality than a reality—child-marriage being generally nothing more than a simple religious ceremony, akin to a Western betrothal, remaining unconsummated until after puberty. In the case of Ramakrishna, making it doubly revolting in the eyes of Miss Mayo, the union was between a little girl of five and a man of twenty-three ! But peace to scandalised minds ! It was a union of souls and remained unconsummated —a Christian marriage so-called in the days of the Early Church—and later it became a beautiful thing. A tree must be judged by its fruits, and in this case the fruits were of God, pure and not carnal love. Little Saradamani[2] was to become the chaste sister of a big friend who venerated her, the immaculate companion of his trials and of his faith, the firm

[1] Gandhi, who knows too much about child-marriage (for he was one of those children who has kept throughout his life the burning confusion of his precocious experiences) is particularly virulent against this abuse. Nevertheless he recognises that in exceptional cases among chosen souls, who are loyal and religious, a mutual engagement dating from infancy may have very pure and beneficent results. It removes all other temptations common to the unhealthy preoccupations of adolescence, and it gives to the union a quality of holy comradeship. It is well known what an admirable companion the little child, whose fate was joined to his, has been for Gandhi during the difficult course of his life.

[2] Her family name was Mukhopadhyaya. Afterwards she was known by the name of Saradadevi.

and serene soul, whom the disciples associated with his sanctity as the *Holy Mother*.[1]

For the time being the little girl returned according to custom to the house of her parents after the ceremony of marriage had been performed, and did not see her husband again for the long period of eight or nine years, while her husband, who seemed to have regained some measure of calm at his mother's house, returned to his temple.

But Kali was waiting for him. Hardly had he crossed the threshold than divine delirium in its most violent form was rekindled. Like Hercules in a Nessus shirt, he was a living funeral pyre. The legion of Gods swooped upon him like a whirlwind. He was torn in pieces. He was divided against himself. His madness returned tenfold. He saw demoniac creatures emerging from him, first a black figure representing sin ; then a Sannyasin, who slew sin like an archangel. (Are we in India or a thousand years ago in some Christian monastery of the West ?) He remained motionless, watching these manifestations issue from him. Horror paralysed his limbs. Once again for long periods[2] at a time his eyes refused to close. He felt madness approaching, and terrified, he appealed to the Mother. The vision of Kali was his only hope of survival. Two years went by in this orgy of mental intoxication and despair.[3]

At length help came.

[1] So she has been called. The Indian of good family has always had this exquisite custom of giving the name "Mother" to all womanhood, however much younger than himself.

[2] He claims for six years.

[3] In 1861 his protectress, Rani Rasmani, died. Fortunately her son-in-law, Mathur Babu, remained devoted to him.

III

THE TWO GUIDES TO KNOWLEDGE: THE BHAIRAVI BRAHMANI AND TOTA PURI

Up to this point he had been swimming alone at the mercy of chance in an uncharted and boundless stream with its roaring rapids and whirlpools of the soul. He was on the verge of exhaustion, when two beings appeared on the scene, who held his head above water, and who taught him how to use its currents in order to cross the stream.

The age-long history of the spirit of India is the history of a countless throng marching ever to the conquest of supreme Reality. All the great peoples of the world, wittingly, or unwittingly, have the same fundamental aim; they belong to the conquerors, who age by age go up to assault the Reality of which they form a part, and which lures them on to strive and climb; sometimes they fall out exhausted, then with recovered breath they mount undaunted until they have conquered or been overcome. But each one does not see the same face of Reality. It is like a great fortified city, beleagured on different sides by different armies, who are not in alliance. Each army has its own tactics and weapons to solve its own problems of attack and assault. Our Western races[1] storm the bastions, the outer works. They desire to overcome the physical.

[1] In order to explain my meaning I am obliged to use the doubtful terms, West and East. But I hope that wise readers

forces of Nature, to make her laws their own, so that they may construct weapons therefrom for gaining the inner citadel, and forcing the whole fortress to capitulate.

India proceeds along different lines. She goes straight to the centre, to the Commander-in-Chief of the unseen General Headquarters; for the Reality she seeks is transcendental. But let us be careful not to put Western "realism" in opposition to Indian "idealism." Both are "realisms." Indians are essentially *realists* in that they are not easily contented with abstractions, and that they attain their ideal by the self-chosen means of enjoyment and sensual possession. They must see, hear, taste and touch ideas. Both in sensual richness and in their extraordinary imaginative power they are far in advance of the West.[1] How then can we reject their evidence in the name of Western reason? Reason, in our eyes, is an impersonal and objective path open to all men. But is reason really objective? To what degree is it true in particular instances? Has it no personal limits? Again, has

will distinguish, as I do, many divisions of the West. For us the East in its ordinary sense means the Near East, the Semitic East, which in my sense of the word is further in spirit from India than some parts of the West, Slav, Germanic or Nordic. At this place in the story I am using the term West to indicate the march to the West of the great European races and those on the other side of the Atlantic, who have detached themselves from the common Indo-European stock.

[1] I am far from denying to Indian thinkers a capacity for intellectual concentration in the Absolute; but even the *Formless* of the Advaita Vedanta is embraced to a certain extent by their burning intuition. Even if the *Formless* is without attributes and beyond vision, is it so certain that it is beyond some form of mysterious touch? Is not revelation itself a kind of terrible contact?

it been carefully noted that the "realisations" of the Hindu mind, which seem to us ultra-subjective, are nothing of the kind in India, where they are the logical result of scientific methods and of careful experiment, tested throughout the centuries and duly recorded? Each great religious visionary is able to show his disciples the way by which without a shadow of doubt they too may attain the same visions. Surely both methods, the Eastern and the Western, merit an almost equal measure of scientific doubt and provisional trust. To the truly scientific mind of to-day a widely generalised mistake, if it be sincere, is a relative truth. If the vision is false, the important thing to be discovered is wherein lies the fallacy, and then to allow its other premises to lead to the higher reality beyond it.

The common belief of India, whether clearly defined or vaguely felt, is that nothing exists save in and through the universal Spirit, the one and indivisible Brahman.[1] The diverse images of everything contained in the universe had their birth in Him, and the reality of the universe is derived from the same universal Spirit, whose conception it is. Individual spirits, we who form an integral and organic part of the Cosmic Spirit, see the idea of the multiform and changing universe, and we attribute an independent reality to it. Until we have achieved knowledge of the one Brahman, we are bewildered by Maya, Illusion, which has no beginning and is outside time; and so we take what is

[1] "Everything is Brahman, all the various objects, both coarse and refined. Everything exists only in Brahman, the one and indivisible"—*Shastra*

nothing but an incessant stream of passing images springing from the invisible source, the One Reality,[1] to be the permanent reality.

Hence we must escape from the stream of Illusion, rolling all round us, and like trout that leap over all barriers and scale waterfalls, we must go back to the source. Such is our unavoidable destiny, but it leads to salvation. Sadhana is the name given to this painful but heroic and magnificent struggle. The Sadhakas are they who wage it. Their small legion, renewed from age to age, is recruited from the fearless souls; for they have to submit to a system of application and rough discipline having the sanction of age-long experiment behind them. Two ways or weapons[2] are open to them, both needing long application and constant practice. The first is the way of "Not this! Not this!",[3] which may be called the way of Knowledge by radical negation, or the weapon of the Jnanin; the second is the way of "This ! This !", which may be called the way of Knowledge by progressive affirmation, or the weapon

[1] I have taken this brief summary of thought from the masterly exposition of Swami Saradananda at the beginning of his *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master.*

[2] There are many others which I shall discuss in the second part of this work, when I study the philosophic and religious thought of Vivekananda. There I shall find room for a long exposition of the Yoga principle of India.

[3] Neti (Not this !) is the name given to Brahman Himself by the authors of the *Upanishads. Cf.* the work of the Christian mystic, St. Denis the Areopagite: *Treatise on Mystic Theology,* Chapter V, where he says that the supreme author of intelligible things is absolutely nothing that can be conceived by the understanding. There the master theologian collects on one page all the negatives in order to define God.

of the Bhakta. The first relies solely on intellectual knowledge, and has always rejected everything, either real or apparent, outside it, proceeding with strained resolution and eyes fixed on the supreme goal. The second is the way of love. The love of the Well-Beloved (whose form varies as it becomes more pure) gradually leads to the renunciation of all else. The way of Jnana is that of the absolute or impersonal God. The way of Bhakti is that of the personal God—at least its pilgrims linger long on the way before finally rejoining the pilgrims of Jnana.

The way of Bhakti was the way the blind instinct of Ramakrishna had unconsciously adopted from the first. But he knew nothing of its windings and lurking ambushes. It was true that a complete Itinerary from Paris to Jerusalem[1] existed, wherein the whole course from the starting point to the winning post was carefully mapped out, containing all the accidents of the way, the mountains and the gradients, the dangerous corners and the stopping places, carefully arranged in advance and wisely distributed. But the runner of Kamarpukur knew nothing of it. He went where his wild heart and his legs carried him ; and at last, exhausted by his super-human efforts, without guidance or assistance, maddened with solitude in the depths of the forest, he had moments when he gave himself up for lost. He had almost reached the last rough halting place, when help came to him through a woman.

One day from his terrace he was watching the

[1] Allusion to the name of a famous book by Chateaubriand.

boats with their multi-coloured sails darting to and fro upon the Ganges, when he saw one put in at the foot of his terrace. A woman came up the steps. She was tall and beautiful, with long unbound hair and wearing the saffron robe of a Sannyasin.[1] She was between thirty-five and forty, but she looked younger. Ramakrishna was struck with her appearance and sent for her. She came. As soon as she saw him, she burst into tears and said :

"My son, I have been looking for you for a long time."[2]

She was a Brahmin of a noble Bengal family, a devotee of Vishnu,[3] highly educated and very learned in holy texts, especially in the Bhakti

[1] A Sannyasin, according to Max Muller's definition, is a person who has left everything and renounced all worldly desires. The definition of the *Bhagavad Gita* is : "One who neither hates nor loves anything." The lady in question had not yet attained this state of divine indifference, as we shall see later.

[2] This encounter with the simple charm of a story from the Arabian Nights, has roused doubts in the minds of European historians. They are inclined to see in this episode, as does Max Muller, a symbol of the psychic evolution of Ramakrishna. But the personality of his instructress during the six years she remained with him contains too many individual traits (and not always to her credit) for there to be any doubt that she was a real woman, with all a woman's weaknesses.

[3] The Vaishnavite cult was essentially a cult of love. Ramakrishna belonged to a Vaishnava family.

Vishnu, the ancient sun god, established his sovereignty, over the whole world by his incarnations, the chief being Krishna and Rama, (*Cf.* Barth : *op. cit.*, p. 100 *et seq.*). Both these divinities appear in the name of the hero of this story, while he was himself saluted later in his life as a new Incarnation, an Avatara, God and man.

Scriptures. She said she was looking for the man inspired by God, whose existence had been revealed to her by the Spirit, and that she had been entrusted with a message for him. Without further introduction and without even discovering her name (she was never known by any other than that of the Bhairavi Brahmani, the Brahmin nun) the relations of mother and son were established there and then between the holy woman and the priest of Kali. Ramakrishna confided in her as a child might have done and told her all the tortured experiences of his life in God, of his Sadhana, together with the misery of his bodily and mental sufferings. He told her that many thought him mad, and asked her humbly and anxiously whether they were right. The Bhairavi, having heard all his confessions, comforted him with maternal tenderness, and told him to have no fear, for he had certainly reached one of the highest states of the Sadhana as described in the Bhakti texts by his own unguided efforts. His sufferings were simply the measure of his ascent. She looked after his bodily welfare and enlightened his mind. She made him in broad daylight go back over the road of knowledge, which he had already traversed alone and blindfold in the night. By instinct alone Ramakrishna had obtained in the course of several years "realisations" which mystic science had taken centuries to achieve; but he could not become truly their master until he had been shown the way whereby he had achieved them.

The Bhakta, whose knowledge is derived through love, begins by accepting one form of God as his chosen ideal, as Ramakrishna the Divine Mother.

For a long time he is absorbed in this one love. At first he cannot attain the object of his devotion, but gradually he comes to see, touch and converse with it. From that moment the slightest concentration is enough to make him feel the living presence of his Lord. As he believes that his Lord is in everything, in all forms, he soon begins to perceive other forms of Gods emanating from his own Beloved. This divine polymorphism peoples his vision. Eventually he is so filled with its music that there is no room in him for anything else, and the material world disappears. This is called Savikalpa Samadhi—or state of super-conscious ecstasy, wherein the spirit still clings to the inner world of thought, and enjoys the sentiment of its own life with God. But when one idea has taken possession of the soul, all other ideas fade and die away, and his soul is very near its final end, the Nirvikalpa Samadhi—the final union with Brahman. It is not far to that cessation of thought wherein at last absolute Unity is realised by complete renunciation.[1] Ramakrishna had travelled along three

[1] I am still depending for this explanation on the treatise of Swami Saradananda. *Cf.* Ruysbroeck: *De Ornatu Spiritalium Nuptiarum*: "Go forth! It is God who speaks. . . . . He speaks through the darkness to the spirit and the spirit sinks and slips away. It must lose itself in the sacred gloom, where bliss delivers man from himself, so that he never finds himself again according to human ideas. In the abyss where love gives the fire of death, I see the dawn of eternal life. . . . By the virtue of this immense love we possess the joy of dying to ourselves and of bursting from our prison house, to be lost in the ocean of the Essence and in the burning darkness." III. 1, 2, and 4, and *passim*.

quarters of this spiritual pilgrimage as a blind man.[1] The Bhairavi, whom he adopted as his spiritual mother, as his Guru or teacher, showed him all its phases and their import. Having herself practised religious exercises, she was conversant with the roads of knowledge, and so she made him try all the roads of the Sadhana in turn and methodically according to the rules of the Holy Books,—even the most dangerous ones, the Tantras, which expose the sense and spirit to all the disturbances of the flesh and the imagination, so that these may be overcome. But the path skirts the precipices of degradation and madness, and more than one who has ventured upon it has never returned. Ramakrishna the pure, however, came back as pure as he started out, and tempered as steel.

He was now in possession of all forms of union with God by love—"the nineteen attitudes," or different emotions of the soul in the presence of its Lord, such as the relations of a servant and his master, a son and his mother, a friend, a lover, a husband, etc. He had invested all sides of the Divine citadel; and the man who had conquered God partook of His nature.

His initiator recognised in him an Incarnation of the Divinity. She accordingly called a meeting at Dakshineswar and after learned discussion by the Pandits, the Bhairavi insisted that the theologi-

[1] But his nature had held him back on the last mile of the way, at the cross-roads where man takes leave of the personal God and of his love. His spiritual mother, the Bhairavi, did not try to urge him beyond them. They both instinctively shrank from the blind vision, from the last abyss, the Imperosnal.

cal authorities should give public recognition to the new Avatara.

Then his fame began to spread. People came from afar to see the wonderful man, who had succeeded, not only in one Sadhana, but in all. The ascetics, who by one road or another were straining towards God—monks, sages, Sadhus, visionaries—all came to seek his advice and to be instructed by him, who now sat at the cross-roads and dominated them. Their accounts speak of the fascination produced by the appearance of the man who had come back —not, as Dante, from Hell—but as a pearl-fisher from the deep sea—of the golden radiance of his body burnt and purified so long in the fires of ecstasy.[1] But to the end of his life he remained the most simple of men without a trace of pride ; for he was too intoxicated with God to consider himself, and was preoccupied much less with what he had already achieved than with what was still to do. He disliked all mention of his being an Avatara, and when he had arrived at the point that everybody else, even the Bhairavi, his guide, took to be the summit, he looked up to the rest of the ascent, the last steep *arete*. And he was obliged to climb to the very top.

But for this last ascent the old guides were not sufficient. And so his spiritual mother, who had jealously cherished him for three years, had, like so many other mothers, the pain of seeing her son

[1] The Yogins of India constantly note this effect of the great ecstasy caused by an afflux of blood. As we shall see later, Ramakrishna could tell as soon as he saw the breast of of a religious man, whom he was visiting, whether or no he had passed through the fire of God.

once dependent on her milk, escape her to follow a higher command from another master with a sterner and more virile voice.

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Towards the end of 1864 just at the moment when Ramakrishna had achieved his conquest of the personal God, the messenger of the impersonal God, ignorant as yet of his mission, arrived at Dakshineswar. This was Tota Puri (the naked man)—an extraordinary Vedantic ascetic, a wandering monk, who had reached the ultimate revelation after forty years of preparation—a liberated soul, whose impersonal gaze looked upon the phantom of this world with complete indifference.

For a long time Ramakrishna, not without anguish, had felt prowling round him the formless God and the inhuman, the superhuman indifference of His *Missi Dominici*[1]—those Paramahamsas from the rarefied heights, detached for ever from all things, terrible ascetics denuded of body and spirit, despoiled of the heart's last treasure: the diamond of love of the Divine. During the early days of his stay at Dakshineswar he had felt the terrible fascination of these living corpses; and he had wept with terror at the idea that he too might have to come to a similar condition. Imagine what it must have cost a nature, such as I have described that of this madman of love, this born lover and artist. He needed to see, to touch, to consume the object of his love, and he remained

[1] *Missi Dominici*=Envoys of the Lord.

unsatisfied until he had embraced the living form, had bathed in it as in a river, and had espoused the divine mould and all its beauties. Such a man was to be forced to abandon the home of his heart and sink body and soul in the formless and the abstract! Such a train of thought must have been more painful and more alien to his nature than it would be to one of our Western scientists.[1]

But he could not escape it. His very terror fascinated him like the eyes of a snake. Dizzy though he was at the contemplation of the heights, he who had reached the peaks was obliged to go on to the very end. The explorer of the continent of the Gods could not stop until he had reached the source of the mysterious Nile.

I have said already that the formless God lay in wait for him with all His terror and attraction. But Ramakrishna did not go to Him. Tota Puri came to fetch the lover of Kali.

He saw him first without being seen as he was passing by; for he could not stay longer than three days in one place. Seated on one of the steps of the temple, the young priest[2] was lost in the happiness of his hidden vision. Tota Puri was struck by it.

"My son," he said, "I see that you have already travelled far along the way of truth. If you so wish it, I can help you to reach the next satge. I will teach you the Vedanta."

Ramakrishna, with an innocent simplicity that

[1] It is a remarkable fact that Ramakrishna, though highly gifted for poetry and the arts, had no taste for mathematics. Vivekananda's mind was of a different order. Though not less artistic he knew and loved the sciences.

[2] He was then twenty-eight years old.

made even the stern ascetic smile, replied that he must first ask leave of the Mother (Kali). She gave Her permission, and he then put himself with humble and complete confidence under the guidance of his divine teacher.

But first he had to submit to the test of "Initiation." The first condition was to renounce all his privileges and insignia, the Brahmin cord and the dignity of priest. These things were nothing to him ; but he had also to renounce his affections and the illusions whereby he had hitherto lived—the personal God and the entire harvest of the fruit of his love and sacrifice here and elsewhere, now and for ever. Naked as the earth he had symbolically to conduct his own funeral service. He had to bury the last remains of his ego—his heart. Then only could he reclothe himself in the saffron robe of a Sannyasin, the emblem of his new life. Tota Puri now began to teach him the cardinal virtues of the Advaita Vedanta,[1] the Brahman one and undifferentiated, and how to dive deep in search

[1] The Advaita, "without second," is the strictest and most abstract form of the Vedanta. It is absolute Non-Dualism. Nothing but one unique Reality exists to the exclusion of every other. Its name is immaterial, God, the Infinite, the Absolute, Brahman, Atman, etc.: for this Reality does not possess a single attribute to assist in its definition. To every attempt at definition, Sankara, like Denis the Areopagite, had only one answer—"No! No!" Everything which has the appearance of existence, the world of our mind and sense, is nothing but the Absolute under a false conception (Avidya). Under the influence of Avidya, which Sankara and his school found it very difficult to explain clearly, Brahman adopts names and forms, which are nothing but non-existence. The only existence beneath this flood of "ego"-phantoms is the true Self, the Paramatman, the One. Good works are powerless to help in Its realisation, although they perhaps help to bring

of the ego, so that its identity with Brahman might be realised and that it might be firmly established in Him through Samadhi (ecstasy).

It would be a mistake to think that it was easy even for one who had gone through all the other stages of ecstasy, to find the key to the narrow door leading to the last. His own account deserves to be reproduced, for it belongs not only to the sacred texts of India, but to the Archives of the West, wherein are preserved all the documents relating to the revelations of the science of the spirit :

" The naked man, Tota Puri, taught me to detach my mind from all objects and to plunge it into the heart of the Atman. But despite all my efforts, I could not cross the realm of name and form and lead my spirit to the Unconditional state. I had no difficulty in detaching my mind from all objects with the one exception of the too familiar form of the radiant Mother,[1] the essence of pure knowledge, who appeared before me as a living reality. She barred the way to the beyond. I tried on several occasions to concentrate my mind on the precepts of the Advaita Vedanta ; but each time the form of the Mother intervened. I said to Tota Puri in despair : ' It is no good. I shall never succeed in lifting my spirit to the " unconditioned " state and

about a propitious atmosphere from whence Consciousness may emerge. But Consciousness alone and direct can deliver and save the soul (Mukti). Hence the *" Know thyself "* of the Greeks is opposed, as has been shown, to the *" See the Self and be the Self "* of the great Indian Vedantists. . . *Tat twam asi* (Thou art That).

[1] Always Kali, the Beloved.

find myself face to face with the Atman.' He replied severely: 'What! You say you cannot? You must!' Looking about him, he found a piece of glass. He took it and stuck the point between my eyes, saying: 'Concentrate your mind on that point.' Then I began to meditate with all my might, and as soon as the gracious form of the Divine Mother appeared, I used my discrimination as a sword,[1] and I clove Her in two. The last barrier fell and my spirit immediately precipitated itself beyond the plane of the 'conditioned,' and I lost myself in Samadhi."

The door of the Inaccessible was only forced with great strain and infinite suffering. But hardly had Ramakrishna crossed the threshold than he attained the last stage—the Nirvikalpa Samadhi—wherein subject and object alike disappeared.

"The Universe was extinguished. Space itself was no more. At first the shadows of ideas floated in the obscure depths of the mind. Monotonously a feeble consciousness of the Ego went on ticking. Then that stopped too. Nothing remained but Existence. The soul was lost in Self. Dualism was blotted out. Finite and Infinite space were as one. Beyond word, beyond thought, he attained Brahman."

In one day he had realised what it had taken Tota Puri forty years to attain. The ascetic was

[1] This is not a case of the clumsy auto-hypnotism of the hen, who falls into a catalepsy along a chalk line in the sun, (thus I read the disrespectful thought of my Western reader). The action of mind described by Ramakrishna was an effort of severe concentration, which excluded nothing, but which involved keen and critical analysis.

astounded by the experience he had provoked, and regarded with awe the body of Ramakrishna, rigid as a corpse for days on end, radiating the sovereign serenity of the spirit, which has reached the end of all knowledge.

Tota Puri ought only to have stayed three days. He remained eleven months for intercourse with the disciple who had outstripped his master. Their parts were now reversed. The young bird came down from a higher region of the sky, whence he had seen beyond the loftiest circle of hills. His dilated pupils carried a wider vision than the sharp narrow eyes of the old "naga."[1] The eagle taught the serpent in his turn.

This did not come about without considerable opposition.

Let us put the two seers face to face.

Ramakrishna was a small brown man with a short beard and beautiful eyes, "long dark eyes, full of light, obliquely set and slightly veiled,"[2] never very wide open, but seeing half-closed a great distance both outwardly and inwardly. His mouth was half open over his white teeth in a bewitching smile,[3] at once affectionate and mischievous. Of medium height, he was thin to emaciation and extremely delicate.[4] His temperament was exceptionally highly strung, for he was supersensitive to all the winds of joy and sorrow,

[1] The name of the sect to which Tota Puri belonged. *Naga* also means snake.

[2] Mukerji.

[3] Mahendra Nath Gupta.

[4] In the journeys he took afterwards with Mathur Babu he became tired at once. He could not walk and had to be carried.

both moral and physical. He was indeed a living reflection of all that happened before the mirror of his eyes, a two-sided mirror turned both out and in. His unique plastic power allowed his spirit instantaneously to shape itself according to that of others, without, however, losing its own *feste Burg,*[1] the immutable and infinite centre of endless mobility. "His speech was Bengali of a homely kind . . . . with a slight though delightful stammer; but his words held men enthralled by the wealth of spiritual experience, the inexhaustible store of simile and metaphor, the unequalled powers of observation, the bright and subtle humour, the wonderful catholicity of sympathy and the ceaseless flow of wisdom."[2]

Facing this Ganges with its depths and its reflections, its liquid surface and its currents, its windings and meanders and the millions of beings it bore and nourished, the other rose like the Rock of Gibraltar. He was very tall and robust, with magnificent physique, resolute and indestructible —a rock with the profile of a lion. His constitution and mind were of iron. He had never known

[1] That is, from the moment when he had succeeded in uniting all the threads of the groups of forms and destinies in their centre, Brahman. Until then he had been taken by each in turn.

(*Ein Feste Burg* is the famous hymn sung by Luther as he entered the city of Worms to answer for his opinions before the Emperor and the Imperial Diet in 1520. It begins, "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott,"—"a Stronghold sure is our God."—*Translator*).

[2] The last touches of this portrait are taken from the memory of an eye-witness still living, Nagendranath Gupta. (*Cf. Prabuddha Bharata,* March 1927, and *The Modern Review,* May 1927).

illness or suffering, and regarded them with smiling contempt. He was the strong leader of men. Before adopting a wandering life he had been the sovereign head of a monastery of seven hundred monks in the Punjab. He was a master of disciplinary method, which petrified as argil the flesh and the spirit of men.[1] It never entered his head that anything could check his sovereign will—passion, danger, the storms of the senses, or the magic force of Divine Illusion, which raises the tumultuous waves of existence. To him Maya was something non-existent, a void, a lie, which only required to be denounced to vanish for ever. To Ramakrishna Maya itself was God, for everything was God. It too was one face of Brahman. Moreover, when he had reached the summit after the stormy ascent, Ramakrishna forgot nothing of the anguish, the transports, the accidents of the climb. The most insignificant pictures of his journey remained in his memory, registered according to their kind, each in its own time and place in the wonderful panorama of peaks. But what was there for the "naked man" to store up in his memory? His mind was like himself, void of emotions and loves—"a brain of porphyry," as an Italian described the greatest painter of

[1] The educational psycho-physiology of our day should interest itself in the methods used in the exercise of meditation: first comfortable seats, then harder and harder ones, then the bare ground, while at the same time clothing and food are gradually reduced until a state of nakedness and extreme privation is reached. After this initiation the novices are scattered to wander through the country, first with companions and then alone until the last ties binding them to the outside world have been completely severed.

Umbria.[1] This marble tablet needed to be carved by the chisel of fruitful suffering ; and so it came about.

In spite of his great intellect, he did not understand that love could be one of the paths leading to God. He challenged the experience of Ramakrishna and poured scorn on prayers said aloud, and on all external manifestations, such as music, hymns and religious dances. When he saw Ramakrishna at the close of the day beginning his repetition of the names of God to the accompaniment of clapping of hands, he asked with a derisive smile : "Are you making bread ?"

But in spite of himself the charm began to work within him. Certain hymns sung in his companion's melodious voice moved him, so that hidden tears came into his eyes. The insidious and enervating climate of Bengal also affected this Punjabi, although he tried to ignore it. His relaxed energy could no longer keep such rigorous control over his emotions. There are contradictions, often unobserved by their owners, even in the strongest minds. This scorner of cults had the weakness to adore a symbol in the shape of fire ; for he always kept a lighted one near him. One day a servant came to remove some brands, and Tota Puri protested against such disrespect. Ramakrishna laughed, as only he knew how to laugh, with the gaiety of a child.

"Look, look," he cried. "You also have succumbed to the irresistible power of Maya !"

Tota Puri was dumbfounded. Had he really

[1] Pietro Perugino, the master of Raphael. The judgment is Vasari's.

submitted to the yoke of Illusion without being aware of it? Illness too made his proud spirit realise its limitations. Several months in Bengal brought on a violent attack of dysentery. He ought to have gone away, but this would have been running away from evil and sorrow. He grew obstinate. "I will not give in to my body!" The trouble increased, and his spirit could no longer abstract itself. He submitted to treatment, but it was of no avail. The sickness grew more virulent with every dawn like a shadow gradually overcasting the day, and became so overwhelming that the ascetic could no longer concentrate his mind on Brahman. He was roused to fury by this evidence of decay, by his body, and went down to the Ganges to sacrifice it. But an invisible hand restrained him. When he had entered the stream he had no longer either the will or the power to drown himself. He came back utterly dismayed. He had experienced the power of Maya. It existed everywhere, in life, in death, in the heart of pain, the Divine Mother! He passed the night alone in meditation. When morning dawned he was a changed man. He acknowledged before Ramakrishna that Brahman and Shakti[1] or Maya are one and the same Being. The Divine Mother was appeased and delivered him from his illness. He bade farewell to the disciple who had become his master, and went on his way, an enlightened man.[2]

[1] Shakti means Divine Energy, the radiance of Brahman.

[2] The departure of Tota Puri took place towards the end of 1865. It is possible that it was he, who gave to the son of Khudiram the famous name of Ramakrishna that he bears

Afterwards Ramakrishna summed up in these words the double experience of Tota Puri :

"When I think of the Supreme Being as inactive, neither creating, nor preserving, nor destroying, I call Him Brahman or Purusha, the impersonal God. When I think of Him as active, creating, preserving, destroying, I call Him Shakti or Maya or Prakriti,[1] the personal God. But the distinction between them does not mean a difference. The personal and the impersonal are the same Being, in the same way as milk and its whiteness, or the diamond and its lustre, or the serpent and its undulations. It is impossible to conceive of the one without the other. The Divine Mother and Brahman are one."[2]

to-day, when he initiated him as a Sannyasin. *Cf.* Saradananda : *Sadhaka Bhava,* p. 285. Note I.

[1] Prakriti is "Energy, the Soul of Nature, the power of the will to act in the Universe." (Definition of Aurobindo Ghose, who puts it in opposition to the "silent and inactive Purusha.")

[2] Compare this text with another, less known but still more striking, showing what should be our judgment of the impassioned cult of Ramakrishna for Kali, and the profound sense of Unity underlying this apparent idolatry :

"Kali is none other than He whom you call Brahman. Kali is Primitive Energy (Shakti). When it is inactive we call it Brahman (literally : we call That. . . .). But when it has the function of creating, preserving or destroying, we call That Shakti or Kali. He whom you call Brahman, She whom I call Kali, are no more different from each other than fire and its action of burning. If you think of the one, you automatically think of the other. To accept Kali is to accept Brahman. To accept Brahman is to accept Kali. Brahman and His power are identical. That is what I call Shakti or Kali."

(Conversations of Ramakrishna with Naren (Vivekananda) and Mahendra Nath Gupta, on the subject of the theories of Sankara and of Ramanuja—published in *The Vedanta Kesari,* November 1916).

IV

IDENTITY WITH THE ABSOLUTE

THIS great thought was by no means new. The spirit of India had been nourished upon it for centuries and in their course it had been constantly moulded, kneaded, and rolled out by Vedantic philosophy. It had been the subject of interminable discussions between the two great Vedantic schools, that of Sankara—the pure Advaita school—and of Ramanuja or Vishistadvaita school (qualified monism). The first, the absolute non-Dualist, considers the Universe unreal and the Absolute the only reality; the second relatively non-Dualist, recognises Brahman as the only reality, but gives to the world of appearances, to individual souls, the value of modifications or modes which are not illusory, but are radiant with the attributes of Brahman. Such are thought, and energy which sows the seed of living multiplicity.[1] These two schools tolerate each other, the extremists of the first looking with scornful indulgence upon the second, for having adopted a transitory compromise as a sop to human weakness or as a crutch to lean upon during the tottering ascent. The crucial point had always been the definition of "phenomenal" Illusion, the essence of Maya. Was it to be considered relative

[1] Thus was formed a ladder of *Natura Naturans* (Nature which creates nature), perpetually in motion and increasing in a latent power of acending, wherein Max Muller and after him Vivekananda have recognised the origin of the doctrine of Evolution.

or absolute? Sankara himself did not attempt to define Maya. He only said that Illusion existed and that the aim of the Advaita philosophy was to annihilate it. On the other hand, the object of the "qualified" Advaitists, such as Ramanuja, was to make use of it in some way for the evolution of individual souls.

What then was the exact position of Ramakrishna between the two schools? The warm plasticity of his nature inclined him rather to the conciliatory solution of Ramanuja. But on the other hand, the intensity of his faith made him subscribe to the most extreme conception of the Absolute. His genius discovered the most vivid expressions, the most ingenious parables to affirm, not only the impossibility of explaining It, but even of approaching It through the understanding. He imparted an almost physical contact with the "unconditioned Being," with the Sun of whom Sankara said, when replying to the objection that the purely intellectual Absolute was impossible apart from the objects of the intellect, that "the sun shines even without objects to shine upon." But there is a difference in the expressions used by Ramakrishna. He had much too keen a vision to be able to pass by the "objects to shine upon" even when he denied their existence. He said of his Sun that It shone alike on the evil and on the good—that It was the light of a lamp whereby one man might read the Holy Scriptures and another might commit a forgery—that It was the sugar mountain which the ants, when replete, imagined that they had carried away whereas they had only nibbled a few crumbs—that It was the sea at whose

edge the salt doll leaned to measure the depth, but from the moment her foot touched the water, she melted, she was lost, she disappeared.[1] "The unconditioned Being" is something that we cannot grasp. It eludes us, but that does not mean that we do not exist. It illumines our efforts, our ignorance, our wisdom, our good and our evil deeds, we nibble at Its outer shell, but there is a point of fusion when It takes us again into Its great mouth and absorbs us into Itself. But before the point of fusion is reached where was the salt doll? Where do the ants come from? In the case of the worker under the lamp, saintly hermit or forger, where is his home, where is the object he reads and his eyesight itself?

Ramakrishna tells us that even the inspired Holy Scriptures have all been more or less defiled because they have passed through human mouths. But is the defilement real? (For it presupposes the purity, the Brahman). Where do the lips and the mouth exist, which have eaten some portions of Divine food?

The "differentiated," although it is "without attachments," must then be some part of the "Undifferentiated," especially since "attachment" in the last resort,—"union between the Undifferen-

[1] "Once upon a time there was a salt doll. She came down to the sea with the intention of measuring its depth, and she held a sounding rod in her hand. When she arrived at the edge of the water, she looked at the mighty ocean. Up to that point she had been a salt doll, but if she had taken one step forward, if she had put one foot into the sea, she would have become merged in the ocean. The salt doll would never have been able to come back to us to tell us the depth of the Ocean." (*The Gospel of Ramakrishna.*)

tiated and the differentiated,"—is, to use Ramakrishna's own words, "the real object of the Vedanta."[1]

In fact Ramakrishna[2] distinguishes two distinct planes and stages of vision: that under the sign of Maya, which creates the reality of the "differentiated" universe, and the supervision of perfect contemplation (Samadhi) wherein one instant's contact with the Infinite is sufficient to make the Illusion of all "differentiated" egos, our own and other men's, disappear immediately. But Ramakrishna expressly maintains that it is absurd to pretend that the world is unreal so long as we form part of it, and receive from it for the maintenance of our own identity the unquenchable conviction (although hidden in our own lantern) of its reality. Even the saint who comes down from Samadhi (ecstasy) to the plane of ordinary life is forced to return to the envelope of his "differentiated" ego, however attenuated and purified. He is flung back into the world of relativity. "So far as his ego is relatively real to him, so far will this world also be real; but when

[1] It is to be noted in passing how the metaphysics of the Advaitic Absolute are akin to the doctrines of the pre-Socratian Greeks—to the doctrine of the "Indeterminate" of Anaximander of Ionia for instance, wherein he laid down that all things have been produced by separation—to the doctrine of the One without Second of Xenophanes and the Eleates, who exclude all movement, all change, all future, all multiplicity as nothing but Illusion. There is much research still to be done before the unbroken chain of thought linking the first pioneers of Hellenic philosophy to those of India is re-established.

[2] For this I rely upon the Interviews of 1882, when he was near the end of his life and which therefore contain the essence of his thought.

his ego has been purified, he sees the whole world of phenomena as the manifold manifestation of the Absolute to the senses."

Maya will then appear under its true colours, at once truth and falsehood, knowledge and ignorance (Vidya and Avidya), everything that leads to God, and everything that does not lead to Him. *Therefore it is.*

And his assertion has the personal value of a St. Thomas the Apostle who has both seen and touched, when he bears witness to these Vijnanis, these men of super-knowledge who win the privilege of "realising" in this life the personal and the impersonal God—for he was one himself.

They have seen God both outwardly and inwardly. He has revealed Himself to them. The personal God has told them: "I am the Absolute. I am the origin of 'differentiation'." In the essence of Divine Energy radiating from the Absolute they have perceived the very principle differentiating the supreme Atman and the universe, that which is alike in the Absolute God and in Maya. Maya, Shakti, Prakriti, Nature is no Illusion. To the purified ego She is the manifestation of the supreme Atman, the august sower of living souls and of the universe.

From that moment everything became plain. The visionary hurled back from the gulf on fire with Brahman discovered with rapture that on the brink the Divine Mother, his Beloved, was awaiting him. And he saw Her now with new eyes, for he had grasped Her deep significance, Her identity with the Absolute. She was the Absolute, manifesting Herself to men, the Impersonal made man

—or rather Woman.[1] She was the source of all Incarnations, the Divine Intercessor between the Infinite and the finite.[2]

Then Ramakrishna intoned the Canticle of the Divine Mother:

"Yea! My Divine Mother is none other than the Absolute. She is at the same time the One and the Many, and beyond the One and the Many. My Divine Mother says: 'I am the Mother of the Universe, I am the Brahman of the Vedanta, I am the Atman of the Upanishads. It is I,

[1] In India the personal God is conceived also as a female principle: Prakriti, Shakti.

[2] Compare the part of the Son in Christian mysticism:

"Effulgence of my glory, Son Beloved, (*It is God who speaks*)
Son, in whose face invisible is beheld
Visibly, what by Deity I am,
And in whose hand what by decree I do,
Second Omnipotence! . . . ."

(Milton: *Paradise Lost,* VI, 680.)

This might have been said by Ramakrishna with the exception perhaps of the word "Second," which makes the expression subordinate to the Supreme Will creating it. But both of them are the same Omnipotence. The God of Milton, like the Brahman of Ramakrishna, being the Absolute, not manifest, could not act; He wished and it was the Son who was the Creator God, the acting God (as was the Mother in the case of Ramakrishna). The Son is the Word, He speaks, He dies, He is born, He is made manifest. The Absolute is the invisible God.

"Fountain of light, Thyself invisible. . . ."

(*Paradise Lost,* III, 374.)

He is impalpable and inconceivable. He is immovable and nevertheless omnipresent; for He is in all things:

"The Filial Power arrived, and sat him down
With his great Father; for he also went
Invisible, yet stayed (such privilege
Hath Omnipresence) . . . ."

(*Paradise Lost,* VII. 588.)

Cf. Denis Saurat: *Milton and Material Christianity* in

Brahman, who created differentiation. Good and bad works alike obey Me. The Law of Karma[1] in truth exists ; but it is I, who am the Law-giver. It is I who make and unmake laws. I order all Karma, good and bad. Come to Me ! Either through Love (Bhakti), through Knowledge (Jnana) or through Action (Karma), for all lead to God. I will lead you through this world, the Ocean of action. And if you wish it, I will give you the knowledge of the Absolute as well. You cannot escape from Me. Even those who have realised the Absolute in Samadhi return to Me at My will.' My Divine Mother is the primordial Divine Energy. She is omnipresent. She is both the outside and the inside of visible phenomena. She is the parent of the world, and the world carries Her in its heart. She is the Spider and the world is the web She has spun. The Spider draws the thread out of Herself and then winds it round Herself. My Mother is at the same time the container and the contained.[2] She is the shell, but She is also the kernel."

The elements of this ardent Credo are borrowed from the ancient sources of India. Ramakrishna and his followers never claimed that the thought was new.[3] The Master's genius was of another

England, 1928. The similarity of the mysticisms is obvious and natural. Both had their origin in the East, and both came from the same human brain with its limited operation.

[1] Action—the generating power of successive existences.

[2] *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,* according to M., a son of the Lord and a disciple. (In *The Life of Swami Vivekananda,* last edition, 1922-24.)

[3] On the contrary their tendency was to deny the fact, even when they might have claimed originality. The great religious minds of modern India, and, I believe, of all other

order. He roused from lethargy the Gods slumbering in thought and made them incarnate. He awoke the springs in the "sleeping wood"[1] and warmed them with the heat of his magic personality. And so this ardent Credo is his own in its accent and its transport, in its rhythm and melody, in its song of passionate love.[2]

Listen closely to it, for it is a magnificent song,

countries, have this in common, that their very power lies in the assurance that *their* truth is a very ancient one, an eternal verity, *the* Verity. Dayananda, the stern founder of the Arya Samaj, was very angry if new ideas were attributed to him.

[1] An allusion to the title of the well-known fairy story, the Sleeping Beauty.

(The French title is: *La Belle au Bois Dormant,* and its literal translation is: the Beauty in the Sleeping Wood.—*Translator.*)

[2] It must not be forgotten that its poetic and musical elements are in part borrowed from the popular treasures of Bengal. We have seen (pp. 27-28) how his mind had been impregnated with the classical Vaishnavite poets, through their adaptations in the jatras or popular theatrical representations. He often sang a hymn from the works of Kabir, but his mind was also stored with the works of more recent poets and musicians. (*Cf. The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*). One of the oldest and one for whom he seems to have had a particular affection, was Ramprasad, a poet of the eighteenth century. Ramakrishna constantly quoted and sang his sacred hymns to the Divine Mother. It was to Prasad that Ramakrishna owed some of his most striking metaphors (that of the flying kite, for example, mentioned later) and some characteristic traits of the Mother (the mischievous twinkle in the corner of Her eye, when She made use of illusion to bewilder the child She loved).

Among the other poet-musicians mentioned in the *Gospel* I noted the names of Kamalakanta, a pandit of the beginning of the nineteenth century, a devotee of the Mother; Nareschandra, belonging to the same period, also a devotee of Kali; Kubir, a Bengal Vaishnavite saint of the same epoch, author of popular songs; and among the more recent, Premdas (his real name was Trailokya Sannyal) a disciple of Keshab, author of songs, which often owed their inspiration to the improvisa-

illimitable and yet harmonious. It is not confined within the form of any poetic measure, but it falls of itself into an ordered beauty and delight. Adoration of the Absolute is united without effort to the passionate love of Maya. Let us keep in our ears its cry of love until we can measure its depth later by listening to Vivekananda. That great fighter, caught in the toils of Maya, tried to break them, and he and she were constantly at war. Such a state was completely foreign to Ramakrishna. He was at war with nothing. He loved his enemy as a lover, and nothing could resist his charm. His enemy ended by loving him. Maya enfolded him in Her arms. Their lips met. Armide had found her Renaud.[1] The Circe who bewitched crowds of other suitors became for him the Ariadne who led Theseus by the hand through the mazes of the labyrinth. Illusion, the all-powerful, who hoods the eyes of the falcon, unhooded Ramakrishna's and threw him from Her wrist into the wide regions of the air. Maya is the mother[2] who reveals Herself to Her children through the various forms of Her splendour and by Divine Incarnations. With Her love, with the fire of Her heart She moulds the sheath of the ego so well that it becomes no more than "something that has length but no breadth,"

tions of Ramakrishna, and Girish Chandra Ghose, the great dramatist, who became Ramakrishna's disciple, (songs from his plays, *Chaitanyalila, Buddha-charita,* etc.).

[1] Allusion to the characters of Torquato Tasso's poem, *Jerusalem Unbound.*

[2] Or the "eldest sister." Elsewhere Ramakrishna said to Keshab Chunder Sen, "Maya is created by the Divine Mother, as forming part of Her Plan of the universe." The Mother plays with the world. The world is Her toy. "She lets slip

a line, a point, which melts under the magic fingers of this subtle refiner into Brahman.

So praised be the fingers and the water! Praised be the face and the veil! All things are God. God is in all things. He is in the shadow as well as in the light. Inspired by the English "Mortalists" of the seventeenth century,[1] Hugo said that the Sun is only the shadow of God.[2] Ramakrishna would have said that the shadow is also light.

But it is because like all true Indian thinkers he believes in nothing that he has not first "realised" throughout his entire being, that his thought has the breath of life. The "conception" of the idea regains with him its plain and carnal meaning. To believe is to embrace, and after the embrace to treasure within oneself the ripening fruit.

When Ramakrishna has once known the grasp of such truths, they do not remain within him as ideas. They quicken into life; and fertilised by his Credo, they flourish and come to fruition in an orchard of "realisations," no longer abstract and isolated, but clearly defined and having a practical bearing on everyday life for the satisfaction of the hunger of men. He will find the Divine Flesh, which he has tasted and which is the substance of the universe again, the same, at all tables and all religions. And he will share the

the flying kite of the soul, held by the string of Illusion." (October, 1882).

[1] Denis Saurat: *Milton and Christian Materialism in England*, p. 52.

[2] *Cf.* Milton: "Dark with excessive light thy skirts appear." (*Paradise Lost*, III, 374.)

food of immortality in a Lord's Supper,[1] not with twelve apostles, but with all starving souls—with the universe.

*

After the departure of Tota Puri towards the end of 1865 Ramakrishna remained for more than six months within the magic circle, the circle of fire, and prolonged his identity with the Absolute until the limit of physical endurance had been reached. For six months, if such a statement is credible, he remained in a state of cataleptic ecstasy, recalling the description given of the fakirs of old—the body, deserted by the spirit like an empty house, given over to destructive forces. If it had not been for a nephew, who watched over the masterless body and nourished its forces, he would have died.[2] It was impossible to go.

[1] Allusion to the Last Supper of Jesus Christ and his disciples.

[2] It is said that a monk who happened to come to Dakshineswar at that time, seeing him on the point of breathing his last, recalled his escaping life with blows.

The great disciple, Saradananda, the most learned in Hindu metaphysics, and more deeply versed in the intellectual make-up of his Master than any who came near Ramakrishna, has described this Nirvikalpa Samadhi, this great ecstasy of six months, as a state where the consciousness of the ego disappeared completely, coming back now and again very gently, just veiling the perfect "realisation." According to Saradananda, Ramakrishna perceived in these moments of semi-consciousness the order of the Cosmic Spirit (or we) may style it the obscure recall and tyranny of the vital force), "which forced him to remain in the Bhavamukha." It said in effect: "Do not lose complete consciousness of the ego, and do not identify thyself with the transcendental Absolute, but realise that the Cosmic Ego, wherein are born the infinite modes of the universe, is within thee; at every moment of thy life, see and do good in the world."

And so it was during the descent from this long Samadhi that Ramakrishna came to "realise" his divine mission, not

further in ecstatic union with the "Formless." It is, moreover, the extreme period of this long Yogic trance which is likely to puzzle, nay, to irritate my French readers, who are used to treading on firm earth, and have not experienced the shocks of spiritual fires for a long time. Patience for a little while longer! We shall come down from the Mount of Sinai—down among men.

Ramakrishna himself recognised afterwards that he had been tempting Providence and that it was a miracle that he had ever returned. He was careful to warn his disciples against submitting to any such test. He even forbade it to Vivekananda, on the ground that it was a form of pleasure forbidden to those noble souls, whose duty it was to sacrifice their own happiness to the service of others.[1] When young Naren (Vivekananda) importuned him to open to him the

perhaps in a single day or suddenly, but gradually. In any case it would be in the first half of 1866.

[1] How much more then did he dissuade ordinary men from it! For those whose bed in life is a narrow one, would have been submerged by its torrents to their own hurt and the hurt of the community. The way he cured his Sancho Panza, his young nephew, the faithful and matter-of-fact Hridoy, and his rich patron, Mathur Babu, of their longing for the forbidden fruits of ecstasy, shows a humour and good sense worthy of Cervantes.

Hridoy, a good soul and devoted to his uncle but of the earth earthy, desired to share his uncle's fame. He thought that by family right he ought to benefit from the spiritual advantages of Ramakrishna. He had no patience with the latter's disinterestedness. In vain his uncle tried to dissuade him from experimenting in ecstasy. The other persisted, with the result that his brain became completely disordered and he had attacks of convulsions and screaming. "Oh Mother," cried Ramakrishna, "dull the sense of this idiot!" Hridoy fell to the

Nirvikalpa Samadhi—the terrible door leading to the gulf of the Absolute—Ramakrishna refused with anger, he, who never lost his temper and who was always careful not to hurt the feelings of his beloved son. "Shame on you!" he cried. "I thought you were to be the great banyan tree giving shelter to thousands of tired souls. Instead you are selfishly seeking your own well-being. Let these little things alone, my child. How can you be satisfied with so one-sided an ideal? You must be *all*-sided. Enjoy the Lord in all ways!" (By this he meant both in contemplation and in action, so that he might translate the highest knowledge into the highest service of mankind.)

Naren wept, humiliated and heart-broken with the duty of renunciation. He acknowledged that the Master's severity was just, but to the end of his life he carried a sick longing in his heart for the Abysmal God, although he devoted that life with humility, hardihood and courage to the service of man.

But we must remember that at the point we

ground and overwhelmed his uncle with reproaches. "What have you done, uncle? I shall never experience these ineffable joys again." Ramakrishna maliciously let him alone to do as he pleased. Hridoy was soon visited by frightful visions and was obliged to ask his uncle to deliver him.

The same experience befell the rich Mathur Babu. He longed for Ramakrishna to procure the Samadhi for him. Ramakrishna refused for a long time, but at last he said: "Very well, so be it, my friend." As a result of the coveted Samadhi, Mathur Babu lost all interest and sense in business. This was more than he had bargained for; he became very anxious, and wished to go no further in the matter, so he besought Ramakrishna to remove ecstasy from him for ever. Ramakrishna smiled and cured him.

have reached in our story, Ramakrishna had not yet finished his *Lehrjahre,* his apprenticeship. It is also noteworthy that his life's experience was won at his own risk and expense, and not by common experience, as is partly at least the case with most of us.

His recovery was not due to his own merits or his own desire. He said that the Mother recalled him to a sense of his human duties by physical suffering. He was gradually forced back from the Nirvikalpa Samadhi by a violent attack of dysentery, which lasted for six months.

Both physical and moral suffering attached him to the earth. A monk, who knew him,[1] has said that during the first days of his return from ecstasy to the bosom of identity, he howled with pain when he saw two boatmen quarrelling angrily. He came to identify himself with the sorrows of the whole world, however impure and murderous they might be, until his heart was scored with scars. But he knew that even the differences leading to strife among men are the daughters of the same Mother ; that the " Omnipotent Differentiation " is the face of God Himself ; that he must love God in all sorts and conditions of men, however antagonistic and hostile, and in all forms of thought controlling their existence and often setting them at variance the one with the other. Above all that he must love God *in all their Gods.*

In short he recognised that all religions lead by different paths to the same God. Hence he was eager to explore them all ; for with him comprehension meant existence and action.

[1] *Cf.* D. G. Mukerji : *The Face of Silence.*

V

THE RETURN TO MAN

THE first path to be explored was the religion of Islam. He was hardly convalescent when he started out upon it at the end of 1866.

From his temple he saw many Mussulman fakirs passing by; for the large-hearted patron of Dakshineswar, Rani Rasmani, a "nouvelle riche" of a low caste, in the breadth of her piety had desired rooms to be reserved in her foundation for passing guests of all religions. In this way Ramakrishna saw a humble Mussulman, Govinda Rai, absorbed in his prayers, and perceived through the outward shell of his prostrate body that this man through Islam had also "realised" God. He asked Govinda Rai to initiate him, and for several days the priest of Kali renounced and forgot his own Gods completely. He did not worship Them, he did not even think about Them. He lived outside the temple precincts, he repeated the name of Allah, he wore the robes of a Mussulman and was ready—imagine the sacrilege—to eat of forbidden food, even of the sacred animal, the cow! His master and patron, Mathur Babu, was horrified and begged him to desist. In secret he had food prepared for Ramakrishna by a Brahmin under the direction of a Mussulman in order to save him from defilement. The complete surrender of himself to another realm of thought resulted as always in the spiritual voyage of this passionate artist, in a visual materialisation of the idea. A

radiant personage with grave countenance and white beard appeared to him (thus he had probably visualised the Prophet). He drew near and lost himself in him. Ramakrishna realised the Mussulman God, "the Brahman with attributes." Thence he passed into the "Brahman without attributes". The river of Islam had led him back to the Ocean.

His expositors have later interpreted this experience, following as it did immediately upon his great ecstasy in the Absolute, in a very important sense for India, that Mussulmans and Hindus, her enemy sons, can only be reunited on the basis of the Advaita, the formless God. The Ramakrishna Mission has since raised a sanctuary to Him in the depths of the Himalayas, as the corner-stone of the immense and composite edifice of all religions.

Seven years later (I am grouping the facts for the sake of clearness) an experience of the same order led Ramakrishna to "realise" Christianity. Somewhere about November, 1874, a certain Mallik, a Hindu of Calcutta, with a garden near Dakshineswar, read the Bible to him. For the first time Ramakrishna met Christ. Shortly afterwards the word was made flesh. The life of Jesus secretly pervaded him. One day when he was sitting in the room of a friend, a rich Hindu, he saw on the wall a picture representing the Madonna and Child. The figures became alive. Then the expected came to pass according to the invariable order of the spirit; the holy visions came close to him and entered into him so that his whole being was impregnated with them. This

time the inflowing was much more powerful than in the case of Islam. It covered his entire soul, breaking down all barriers. Hindu ideas were swept away. In terror Ramakrishna, struggling in the midst of the waves, cried out : " Oh Mother, what are you doing ? Help me ! " It was in vain. The tidal race swept everything before it. The spirit of the Hindu was changed. He had no room for anything but Christ. For several days he was filled by Christian thought and Christian love. He no longer thought of going to the temple. Then one afternoon in the grove of Dakshineswar he saw coming towards him a person with beautiful large eyes, a serene regard and a fair skin. Although he did not know who it was, he succumbed to the charm of his unknown guest. He drew near and a voice sang in the depths of Ramakrishna's soul :

" Behold the Christ, who shed his heart's blood for the redemption of the world, who suffered a sea of anguish for love of men. It is He, the master Yogin, who is in eternal union with God. It is Jesus, Love incarnate . . . ."

The Son of Man embraced the seer of India, the son of the Mother, and became merged in him. Ramakrishna was lost in ecstasy. Once again he realised union with Brahman. Then gradually he came down to earth, but from that time he believed in the Divinity of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate God. But, for him Christ was not the only Incarnation. Buddha and Krishna were others.[1]

[1] He used the title very sparingly, however. He had a great veneration for saintly men, such as the Tirthankaras (the

At this point I can imagine our uncompromising Christians, who cherish the body of their one God, raising their eyebrows haughtily, and saying :

" But what did he know of our God ? This was a vision, a figment of the imagination. This was too easy, for he knew nothing of the doctrine."

He did in truth know very little, but he was a Bhakta, who believed through love. He did not claim to possess the knowledge of the Jnanins, who believe through the intellect. But when the bow is firmly held, does not each of the two arrows reach the same target ? And do not both roads meet for the man who journeys to the very end ? Vivekananda, Ramakrishna's great and learned disciple, said of him :

" Outwardly he was Bhakta but inwardly Jnanin.[1] "

At a certain pitch of intensity great love comprehends and great intellect forces the retreats of the heart. Moreover it is surely not for Christians to deny the power of love. It was love that made the humble fishermen of Galilee the chosen disciples of their God and the founders of his

founders of the Jain religion), and the ten Sikh Gurus, but without believing that they were Incarnations. In his own room amongst his Divine pictures was one of Christ, and he burnt incense before it morning and evening. Later it came to pass that Indian Christians recognised in him a direct manifestation of the Christ and went into ecstasy before him.

[1] And Vivekananda added : " But with me it is quite the contrary." Another very great religious thinker of India, also a highly intellectual man, more deeply imbued with European thought than any of his contemporaries, Keshab Chunder Sen, had the noble humility to sit at the feet of the Bhakta, whose intuition of heart enlightened for him the spirit underlying the letter.

Church. And to whom did the risen Christ first appear but to the repentant sinner,[1] whose only claim to the privilege lay in the tears of love wherewith she had washed the feet of Christ and dried them with her hair ?

Lastly, knowledge does not consist in the number of books a man has read. In Ramakrishna's India, as in the India of old, culture is largely transmitted orally, and Ramakrishna gained during the course of his life through intercourse with thousands of monks, pilgrims, pandits, and all sorts of men preoccupied with religious problems, and encyclopædic knowledge of religion and religious philosophy,—a knowledge constantly deepened by meditation.[2] "One day a disciple wondering at his knowledge asked him : 'How were you able to master all past knowledge ?' And Ramakrishna answered : 'I have not read, I have heard the learned. I have made a garland of their knowledge wearing it round my neck, and I have given it as an offering at the feet of the Mother.'"

He could say to his disciples :

"I have practised all religions, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, and I have also followed the paths of the different Hindu sects . . . . I have found that it is the same God towards whom all are directing their steps, though along different paths.

[1] Mary Magdalene.

[2] Ramakrishna understood Sanskrit though he could not speak it. He said : "In my childhood I could gather all that the Sadhus were reading in the house of a neighbouring family, even though it is true that the sense of individual words escaped me. If a pandit spoke in Sanskrit I understood him, but I could not speak it myself." (*Gospel,* II, 17).

You must try all beliefs and traverse all the different ways once.[1] Wherever I look I see men quarrelling in the name of religion—Hindus, Mohammedans, Brahmos, Vaishnavas and the rest, but they never reflect that He, who is called Krishna is also called Shiva, and bears the name of Primitive Energy, Jesus and Allah as well—the same Rama with a thousand names. The tank has several ghats. At one Hindus draw water in pitchers, and call it *jal;* at another Mussulmans draw water in leathern bottles and call it *pani;* at a third Christians and call it *water.* Can we imagine that the water is not *jal,* but only *pani* or *water* ? How ridiculous ! The substance is One under different names and everyone is seeking the same Substance ; nothing but climate, temperament and name vary.[2] Let each man follow his own path. If he sincerely and ardently wishes to know God, peace be unto him ! He will surely realise Him."

*

The period after 1867 added nothing vital to Ramakrishna's inner store[3] but he learnt to use what he had treasured. His revelations were brought into contact with the outside world and his spiritual conquests were confronted with the achievements of other human experience, and he realised more fully the unique prize that had been awarded him. It was during these years that he came to a knowledge of his mission among men and his present duty of action.

[1] *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,* II, 17.

[2] *Ibid.,* II, 248.

[3] Except for his Christian experience, which I have described in the previous pages in its logical place, though it belongs chronologically to the year 1874.

He resembles the Little Poor Man of Assisi in many ways, both moral and physical. He too was the tender brother of everything that lives and dies, and had drunk so deep of the milk of loving kindness that he could not be satisfied with a happiness he could not share with others. On the threshold of his deepest ecstasies he prayed to the Mother as She was drawing him to Herself :

" Oh Mother, let me remain in contact with men ! Do not make me a dried up ascetic ! "

And the Mother, as She threw him back to the shores of life from the depths of the Ocean, replied (half consciously he heard Her voice) :

" Stay on the threshold of relative consciousness for the love of humanity !"[1]

And so he returned to the world of men and his first experience was a bath of warm and simple humanity. In May, 1867, still much enfeebled by the crises he had passed through, he went to rest for six or seven months in his own countryside of Kamarpukur after an absence of eight years.[2] He gave himself up with the joy of a

[1] From that time he resisted all temptation to seek an ecstatic death and avoided its risks. He refused to run the risk of certain dangerous emotions, such as the sight of a holy place, Gaya, in 1868, because it was too full of memories and he knew that he would not be able to bring his spirit back to the plane of ordinary life. He had received the order from within to stay in the world of everyday things in order to help others.

[2] The Bhairavi Brahmani accompanied him, but the experiences of the journey do not redound to her credit. This eminent woman's character was not equal to her intelligence, and her meditations had not raised her above human weaknesses. Having taught Ramakrishna and revealed him to himself, she claimed proprietory rights over him. She had already suffered from the ascendancy of Tota Puri, and she could not

child to the familiar cordiality of the good people of the village, happy at the sight of their little Gadadhar, whose strange fame had reached them and made them rather anxious. And these simple peasants were nearer by their very simplicity to the profundity of his beliefs than the doctors of the towns and the devotees of the temples.

During this visit he learned to know his child wife. Sarada Devi was now fourteen years old. She lived with her parents, but she came to Kamarpukur when she knew her husband had arrived. The spiritual development of the little wife with her pure heart was greater than her age, and she understood at once her husband's mission and the part of pious affection and tender disinterestedness she was to play in it. She recognised him as her guide and put herself at his service.

Ramakrishna has at times been blamed, and very coarsely blamed,[1] for having sacrificed her. She herself never showed any trace of it; she irradiated peace and serenity throughout her life on all who came in contact with her. Moreover

bear to see him reabsorbed in the atmosphere of his birthplace, monopolised by his old companions to whom she was a stranger, without ceremony. Moreover the presence of his young wife, humble and sweet though she was, troubled her and she had not the tact to hide it. After some painful scenes, which did not make her more amiable, she recognised her weakness. She begged Ramakrishna's pardon and left him for ever. He met her again for the last time in Benares, whither she had retired to spend the remainder of her days in a strict search for truth. She died shortly afterwards.

[1] This was especially the case from certain Brahmo Samajists, who were irritated by Ramakrishna's ascendancy over their leader, Keshab Chunder Sen, and they could not forgive him his wide popularity.

there is a fact, which has never before been revealed except by Vivekananda, that Ramakrishna himself was gravely aware of his responsibility and offered his wife the greatest sacrifice of which he was capable if she demanded it—his mission.

"I have learnt," he said to her, "to look upon every woman as Mother. That is the only idea I can have about you. But if you wish to draw me into the world (of Illusion), as I have been married to you, I am at your service."[1]

Here was something entirely new in the spirit of India. Hindu tradition lays down that a religious life *ipso facto* frees a man from every other obligation. Ramakrishna had more humanity and recognised that his wife had binding rights over him. She was, however, magnanimous enough to renounce them, and encouraged him, in his mission. But Vivekananda specifically declares that it was "by consent of his wife" that he was free to follow the life of his choice. Touched by her innocence and self-sacrifice, Ramakrishna took upon himself the part of an elder brother. He devoted himself patiently during the months they were together to her education as a diligent wife and good manager. He had a great deal of practical common sense curiously at variance with his mystic nature. The peasant's son had been brought up in a good school and no detail of domestic or rural life was alien to him. All who knew him remarked on the order and cleanliness of his house, in which

[1] Vivekananda: *My Master*, Vol. IV of his *Complete Works*, 3rd edition, 1923, p. 169.

respect the Little Poor Man of God might have taught his disciples, drawn though they were from the intellectual and upper middle classes.

He returned to Dakshineswar at the end of 1867, and in the course of the following year made several pilgrimages with Mathur Babu, his patron and the master of his temple. In the early months of 1868 he saw Shiva's city, Benares, and Allahabad at the sacred junction of the Ganges and the Jumna, and Brindaban, the very home of legend and of the Song of Songs, the scene of the *Romancero* pastoral of Krishna. His transports, his intoxication may be imagined. When he crossed the Ganges before Benares, "the city of God" seemed to him not built of stone, but like a heavenly Jerusalem, "a condensed mass of spirituality." On the cremating fields of the holy city he saw Shiva with His white body and tawny matted locks and the Divine Mother bending over the funeral pyres and granting salvation unto the dead. When twilight fell on the banks of the Jumna, he met the herdsmen leading their cattle home, and he was carried away with emotion, and ran shouting: "Krishna! Where is Krishna?"

But if he did not see the God Himself, he met something else in the course of his travels of greater importance and deeper meaning for us of the West—he discovered the face of human suffering. Up to that time he had lived in a state of ecstatic hypnosis within the gilded shell of his sanctuary, and the hair of Kali had hidden it from him. When he arrived at Deoghar with his rich companion, he saw its almost naked inhabitants,

the Santhals, emaciated and dying of hunger : for a terrible famine was ravaging the land. He told Mathur Babu that he must feed these unfortunates. Mathur Babu objected that he was not rich enough to support the misery of the whole world. Ramakrishna thereupon sat down among the poor creatures and wept, declaring that he would not move from thence, but would share their fate. Crœsus was obliged to submit and to do the will of his poor priest.

During the summer of 1870 Mathur made the mistake of taking him in the course of another journey to one of his estates at the time of the payment of dues. The harvests had failed for two years running and the tenants were reduced to extreme misery. Ramakrishna told Mathur to remand their dues, to distribute help to them and to give them a sumptuous feast. Mathur Babu protested but Ramakrishna was inexorable.

"You are only the steward of the Mother," he said to the rich proprietor. "They are the Mother's tenants. You must spend the Mother's money. When they are suffering, how can you refuse to help them ? You must do so."

Mathur Babu had to give in.

These things should not be allowed to fall into oblivion. Swami Shivananda, the present head of the Ramakrishna Order (the Ramakrishna Math and Mission), one of the first apostles and a direct disciple of the Master, has described the following scene, which he saw with his own eyes.

One day at Dakshineswar, while he was in a condition of super-consciousness, Ramakrishna said :

"Jiva is Shiva (all living beings are God).[1] Who then dare talk of showing mercy to them? Not mercy, but service, service, for man must be regarded as God!"

Vivekananda was present. When he heard those pregnant words, he said to Shivananda:

"I have heard a great saying to-day. I will proclaim the living truth to the world."

And Swami Shivananda added:

"If anyone asks for the foundation of the innumerable acts of service done by the Ramakrishna Mission since then, he will find it there."[2]

About this time several deaths left the mark of Sorrow's cruel yet brotherly fingers upon Ramakrishna. Though a man lost in God, who regarded departure from this life as a return to endless bliss, he was seen on the occasion of the death of a young friend and nephew to laugh for joy and to sing his deliverance.[3] But the day after his death he was suddenly assailed by the most terrible anguish. His heart was broken, he could hardly breathe and he thought:

"Oh God! Oh God! If it is thus with me,

[1] On another occasion he said: "God is in all men, but all men are not in God: that is the reason why they suffer." (*Sri Ramakrishna's Teachings*, I, 297).

[2] Ramakrishna set the example of the most humble service. He, a Brahmin, went to a pariah's house and asked permission to clean it. The pariah, overcome by the proposal, a criminal one in the eyes of an orthodox Hindu, which might have exposed his visitor and himself to the worst reprisals, refused to allow it. So Ramakrishna went to his house at night when all were asleep and wiped the floor with his long hair. He prayed: "Oh Mother, make me the servant of the pariah!" (Vivekananda: *My Master*).

[3] At that moment he had the vision of a sword drawn from the scabbard

how they must suffer, those who lose their loved ones, their children!"

And the Mother bestowed upon him the duty and the power of administering the balm of faith to mourners.

"Those who did not see it," Swami Shivananda wrote to me "cannot imagine to what an extent this man, so detached from the world, was constantly occupied in listening to the story of their worldly tribulations, poured out to him by men and women alike, and in lightening their burdens. We saw innumerable examples of it, and there may be some householders still living, who call down blessings upon him for his infinite pity and his ardent attempts to relieve the sufferings of men. One day in 1883 Mani Mallick, a rich and distinguished old man, lost his son and came to Ramakrishna with a broken heart. He entered so deeply into the old man's sorrow that it almost seemed as if he were the bereaved father, and his sorrow surpassed Mallick's. Some time passed thus. Suddenly Ramakrishna began to sing."

But not an elegy, not a funeral oration. He sang a heroic song, the story of the fight of the soul with death.

"To arms! To arms! Oh man, death invades thy home in battle array. Get up into the chariot of faith, and arm thyself with the quiver of wisdom. Draw the mighty bow of love and hurl, hurl the divine arrow, the holy name of the Mother!"[1]

"And," concluded Shivananda, "I remember

[1] I give a fragment of this song from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. The scene was by no means unique. Rama-

how the father's grief was assuaged by it. This son gave him back his courage, calmed his sorrow and brought him peace."

As I describe this scene my thoughts go back to our own Beethoven, who without saying a word came and sat down at the piano and consoled a bereaved mother with his song.

This divine communion with living, loving, suffering, humanity was to be expressed in a passionate, but pure and pious symbol. When in 1872 his wife came to him at Dakshineswar for the first time,[1] the tenderness of Ramakrishna, a tenderness compounded of religious respect purged of all trace of desire and sensual disturbance, recognised the Goddess under her veil, and he made a solemn avowal of it. One night in May,

krishna consoled more than one mourner with more than one song. But its heroic character always remained the same.

In the *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* (pp. 652-653) the account is rather different. Ramakrishna listened to the broken-hearted father; he said nothing but passed into a state of semi-consciousness. Suddenly he began to sing the battle hymn with energetic gestures and radiant face. Then he became normal again and talked affectionately to the unhappy man and consoled him.

D. G. Mukherji also describes the same scene as Swami Shivananda and with his usual art. But he was not an eye-witness, while Shivananda and the author of the *Gospel* were.

[1] She stayed with him from March 1872 to November 1873, from April 1874 to September 1875, again in 1882 and finally in 1884, when she remained with him until the end. The story of her first journey to rejoin her husband, when she was in bad health, bravely accomplished with much fatigue and no little danger, is one of the most touching chapters in the life of Ramakrishna. (See Note I, at the end of the volume—a charming adventure, the meeting of Sarada Devi with the brigands). No less extraordinary was her first stay of twenty months and the common life led by the two mystics, both equally chaste and equally passionate.

when everything had been prepared for worship, he made Sarada Devi sit in the seat of Kali, and as priest he accomplished the ritual ceremonies, the Shorhashi Puja,[1] the adoration of womanhood. Both of them were in a condition of semi-conscious or super-conscious ecstasy. When he came to himself he hailed his companion as the Divine Mother. In his eyes She was incarnate in the living symbol of immaculate humanity.[2]

His conception of God, then, was one which grew by degrees, from the idea of the God who is omnipresent and in whom everything is absorbed, like a sun fusing everything in itself, to the warm feeling that all things are God, like so many little suns, in each of which He is present and active. Both, it is true, contain the same idea, but the second reverses the first, so that not only from the highest to the lowest, but from the lowest to the highest, there is a twofold chain joining without a break the one Being to all living beings. Thus man becomes sacred.

Two years before his death, April 5, 1884, he said :

"I can now realise the change that has taken place in me. A long time ago Vaishnav Charan told me that when I could see God in man, I should have attained the perfection of knowledge.

[1] A Tantric ceremony.

[2] The sole witness of this strange scene was the priest from the neighbouring temple of Vishnu.

Ramakrishna's cult of womanhood did not limit itself to his blameless wife. He recognised the Mother even in the most degraded prostitutes. "I myself have seen this man standing before these women," said Vivekananda, "and falling on his knees at their feet, bathed in tears, saying, 'Mother, in one form Thou art in the street and in another form Thou art

At the present moment I see that it is He who moves under a diversity of forms—sometimes as a pious man, sometimes as a hypocrite, sometimes even as a criminal. So I say: 'Narayana in the pious man, Narayana in the hypocrite, Narayana in the criminal and the libertine.'"

*

Once more I have anticipated the story of his life, so that my readers may not lose the thread of the story, and that they may know in advance where the river is bearing us despite its immense meanders and windings, at times seeming to dissipate itself in numerous channels, and at others appearing to turn back on its course.

I take it up again at a point round about 1874 when the full cycle of religious experience had been achieved, and when, as he says himself, he had plucked the three beautiful fruits of the tree of Knowledge—Compassion, Devotion[1] and Renunciation.[2]

During the same period his interviews with the

the universe. I salute Thee, Mother. I salute Thee.'" (*My Master*).

[1] The word Devotion, the term sanctioned by the European translations of Hindu mysticism, is quite inadequate to express the sentiment of a passionate gift of self implied in it. The true meaning of the old word ought to be revived, as it was used in Christian mysticism, for that gives its exact parallel, viz., Dedication. *Cf.* Ruysbroeck: "Of Inward Dedication.—If we wish to belong to God through inward dedication, we shall feel in the depth of our wills and in the depth of our love what may be called the welling up of a living spring, which will rise to eternal life." (*De Septem Custodiis libellus*).

What Hindu Bhakta is there who will fail to recognise himself in the act of "dedication" described here by the Flemish priest of the fourteenth century?

[2] "Compassion, Devotion and Renunciation are the glorious fruits of knowledge." (Interviews of Ramakrishna with the

eminent men of Bengal had made him aware of the inadequacy of their knowledge and of the great starving void awaiting him in the soul of India. He never ceased to make use of all the sources within his reach for adding to his knowledge, from the religious or the learned, from the poor or the rich, from wandering pilgrims or pillars of science and society. Personal pride was quite alien to him; he was instead rather inclined to think that each "seeker after truth" had received some special enlightenment, which he himself had missed, and he was anxious to pick up the crumbs that fell from their table. He therefore sought them out wherever they might be found without considering how he might be received.[1]

celebrated pandit, Vidyasagar, August 5, 1882). *Cf. Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 526.

[1] I have already pointed out that in his temple he had the daily opportunity of talking to the faithful of all sorts and all sects. From the moment when the Bhairavi Brahmani had announced that he was a man visited of God, that he was an Incarnation, people came to see him from far and near. Thus between 1868 and 1871 he saw many famous personalities, such as the great Bengali poet, a convert to Christianity, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, and the masters of Vedantic learning like the pandits Narayan Shastri and Padmalochan. In 1872 he met Visvanath Upadhyaya and Dayananda, the founder of the Arya Samaj, of whom I shall speak in the next chapter. It has not been possible for me to ascertain precisely the date of his visit to Devendranath Tagore. The Hindu authorities do not agree upon this point. It cannot have been later than 1869-1870. The Tagores give 1864-1865 as the approximate date. The authorised biographer of Ramakrishna, M. (Mahendra Nath Gupta), ascribes it to 1863 on the ground that Ramakrishna gave it to be understood that in the course of this visit he saw Keshab Chander Sen officiating in the pulpit of the Adi Brahmo Samaj. Keshab was only the minister of the Samaj from 1862 to 1865; and there are several reasons why Ramakrishna could not have made the journey in 1864-5. At all events it was in 1875 that he visited Keshab after he

At this point it is necessary to give the European reader a brief summary of the great movement stirring in the soul of India for the past sixty years. Too little is heard of their mighty reawakening, although the centenary of one of its most memorable dates, the foundation of the Brahmo Samaj, was celebrated in India this very year (1928). Humanity as a whole ought to have joined with India to commemorate its genial founder; for despite all obstacles he had the will and the courage to inaugurate co-operation between the East and the West on a basis of equality, and between the forces of reason and the power of faith. He did not understand faith to mean a blind acceptance, as it has degenerated into among downtrodden races, but rather a living and seeing intuition.

I speak of Ram Mohun Roy.[1]

had become the head of the new reformed Brahmo Samaj, and it is from that year that their relations of cordial friendship date.

[1] As a general picture I recommend the recent work of K. T. Paul: *The British Connection with India,* 1927, London, Student Christian Movement, which traces with a sure hand the evolution of the national movement and the Hindu religious movement during the last century. K. T. Paul, an Indian Christian and the friend of Gandhi, a great and impartial mind filled with the thought alike of the East and of the West, unites in this work the historical precision of Europe and its science of facts with the science of the soul, a peculiarly Indian science.

Cf. the panoramic sketch, which I published in the Paris Review, *Europe,* December 15, 1928: *India in Movement.*

In its number of October 1928 the Indian Review, *Prabuddha Bharata,* published a very interesting paper of Swami Nikhilananda, which he had previously read in August 1928, to the Convention of Religions at the Centenary of the Brahmo Samaj, on *The Progress of Religion during the last Hundred Years* (in India).

VI

THE BUILDERS OF UNITY

Ram Mohun Roy, Devendranath Tagore, Keshab Chunder Sen, Dayananda

Ram Mohun Roy, an extraordinary man who ushered in a new era in the spiritual history of the ancient continent, was the first really cosmopolitan type in India. During his life of less than sixty years (1774-1833) he assimilated all kinds of thought from the Himalayan myths of ancient Asia to the scientific reason of modern Europe.[1]

He belonged to a great aristocratic Bengali family, bearing the hereditary title of Roy, and he was brought up at the court of the Great

[1] For the life and works of this great forerunner, see *Raja Ram Mohun Roy, His Writings and Speeches,* 1925, Natesan, Madras, whose interest is marred by chronological inexactitude ; and the excellent pamphlet of Ramananda Chatterjee : *Ram Mohun Roy and Modern India,* 1918, The Modern Review Office, Calcutta. These works are based in part on the biography written by Miss Sophia Dobson Collett, who knew him personally.

Cf. N. C. Ganguly, fragments of an important volume bearing on Roy, published in September 1928, by *The Modern Review* of Calcutta.

Manilal C. Parekh : *Rajarshi Ram Mohun Roy,* 1927, Oriental Christ House, Rajkot, Bombay, and Professor Dhirendranath Chowdhuri : "Ram Mohun Roy, the Devotee," *The Modern Review*, October 1928.

This year, the centenary of the foundation of the Brahmo Samaj, gave rise in India to the publication of many studies of Ram Mohun Roy.

For the Brahmo Samaj, the church founded by Roy, see Siva Nath Sastry : *History of the Brahmo Samaj,* 2 Vols., 1911, Calcutta.

[2] His family came originally from Murshidabad. He was born at Burdwan in Lower Bengal.

Moghul, where the official language was Persian. As a child he learnt Arabic in the Patna schools and read the works of Aristotle and Euclid in that language. Thus besides being an orthodox Brahmin by birth[1] he was nurtured in Islamic culture. He did not discover works of Hindu theology until he began to study Sanskrit between the ages of fourteen and sixteen at Benares. His Hindu biographers maintain that this was his second birth ; but it is quite conceivable that he had no need of the Vedanta to imbibe a monotheistic faith. Contact with Islam would have implanted it in him from infancy, and the science and practice of Hindu mysticism only reinforced the indelible influence of Sufism, whose burning breath had impregnated his being from his earliest years.[2]

The ardour of his combative genius, mettle-some as a young war-horse, led him when he was sixteen

[1] On his father's side his family was Vaishnavite.

[2] The intuitive power and mystic enlightenment of his nature have been somewhat obscured, especially in the West, by his reputation as a man of vigorous reasoning power and as a social reformer fighting against the mortal and deadly prejudices of his people. But the mystic side of his genius has been brought to the fore again by Dhirendranath Chowdhuri. The freedom of his intellect would not have been so valuable if it had not been based upon devotional elements equally profound and varied. From infancy he appears to have given himself up to certain practices of Yogist meditation, even to Tantric practices, which he later repudiated, concentrating for days on the name or on one attribute of God, repeating the word until the Spirit manifested its presence (the exercise of Purascharana), taking the vows of Brahmacharya (chastity) and silence, practising the mystic exercises of Sufism, more satisfying than the Bhakti of Bengal, which he found too sentimental for his proud taste. But his firm reason and will never resigned their functions. They governed his emotions

to enter upon a bitter struggle, destined to last as long as life itself, against idolatry. He published a book in Persian with a preface in Arabic attacking orthodox Hinduism. His outraged father thereupon drove him from home. For four years he travelled in the interior of India and Thibet, studying Buddhism without growing to love it, and risking death from Lamaist fanaticism. At the age of twenty the prodigal son was recalled by his father and returned home. In a vain attempt to attach him to the world he was married, but no cage could contain such a bird.

When he was twenty-four he began to learn English, as well as Hebrew, Greek and Latin. He made the acquaintance of Europeans and learnt their laws and their forms of government. As a result he suddenly cast aside his prejudice against the English and made common cause with them. In the higher interests of his people he won their confidence and took them as allies. He had discovered that only by depending on Europe could he hope to struggle for the regeneration of India. Once more he began his violent polemics against barbarous customs such as Sati, the burning of widows.[1] This raised a storm of opposition culminating in his definite expulsion from his family in 1799 at the instance of the Brahmins. A few years later even his mother and his wives, his nearest and dearest, refused to live with him. He spent a dozen hard and courageous years, aban-

[1] It is said that in 1811 he was present at the burning of a young sister-in-law, and that the horror of the sacrifice, heightened by the struggles of the victim, upset him completely, so that he had no peace until he freed the land from such crimes

doned by all except one or two Scottish friends. After accepting a post as tax-collector, he gradually rose until he became the ministerial chief of the district.

After his father's death he was reconciled to his own people and inherited considerable property. The Emperor of Delhi made him a Rajah, and he had a palace and sumptuous gardens in Calcutta. There he lived in the state of a great lord, giving magnificent receptions in the Oriental style with troupes of musicians and dancers. His portrait is preserved for us in the Bristol Museum. It reveals a face of great masculine beauty and delicacy with large brown eyes. He is wearing a flat turban like a crown, and a shawl is draped over a robe of Franciscan brown.[1] Although he lived as a Prince of the Arabian Nights, he did not allow it to interfere with his ardent study of the Hindu Scriptures or his campaigns for restoring the pure spirit of the Vedas. To this end he translated them into Bengali and English and wrote commentaries upon them. He went even further. Side by side with the Upanishads and the Sutras, he made a close study of the Christian Testaments. It is said that he was the first high caste Hindu to study the teachings of Christ. After the Gospels he published in 1820 a book on *The Precepts of Jesus, a Guide to Peace and Happiness.* About 1826 for some time he became a member of a Unitarian Society, founded by one

[1] He had adopted Mohammedan costume. In vain he tried later to impose it at the meetings of the Brahmo Samaj. In dress he possessed an æsthetic taste and hygienic sense of cleanliness and comfort, which belonged rather to Islam than to Hinduism

of his European friends, the Protestant minister, Adam, who secretly flattered himself that he had converted Roy to Christianity, so that he might become its great apostle to the Indians. But Roy was no more to be chained to orthodox Christianity than to orthodox Hinduism, although he believed that he had discovered its real meaning. He remained an independent theist, essentially a rationalist and moralist. He extracted from Christianity its ethical system, but he rejected the Divinity of Christ, just as he rejected the Hindu Incarnations. As a passionate Unitarian he attacked the Trinity no less than polytheism; hence both Brahmins and missionaries were united in enmity against him.

But he was not the man to be troubled on that account. As all other churches were closed to him[1] he opened one for himself and for the free believers of the universe. It was preceded by the founding of the Atmiya Sabha (the Society of Friends) in 1815 for the worship of God, the One and Invisible. In 1827 he had published a pamphlet on the Gayatri, supposed to be the most ancient theistic formula of the Hindus. Eventually in 1828 his chief friends, among whom was Tagore, gathered at his house and founded a Unitarian Association, destined subsequently to have a startling career in India, under the name of the Brahmo Samaj,[2] (Adi Brahmo Samaj) the House of God. It was dedicated to the "worship

[1] With the exception of the excellent Adam's Unitarian Church, which was not in a prosperous condition.

[2] The name of Brahmo Samaj appears erroneously for the first time in the deed of purchase of land whereon the Unitarian temple was built in 1829.

and adoration of the Eternal, Unsearchable and Immutable Being, who is the Author and Preserver of the Universe." He was to be worshipped "not under or by any other name, designation or title peculiarly used for and applied to any particular Being or Beings by any man or set of men whatever." The church was to be closed to none. Ram Mohun Roy wished that his Brahmo Samaj should be a universal house of prayer, open to all men without distinction of colour, caste, nation or religion. In the deed of gift he laid down that no religion "shall be reviled or slightly or contemptuously spoken of or alluded to." The cult was to encourage "the promotion of the contemplation of the Author and Preserver of the Universe" and "of charity, morality, piety, benevolence, virtue and the strengthening the bonds of union between men of all religious persuasions and creeds."

Roy then wished to found a universal religion, and his disciples and admirers voluntarily called it "Universalism." But I cannot accept this term in its full and literal meaning; for Roy excluded from it all forms of polytheism from the highest to the lowest. The man who wishes to regard without prejudice religious realities at the present day, must take into account that polytheism, from its highest expression in the Three in One of the Christian Trinity to its most debased, holds sway over two-thirds at least of mankind. Roy called

Its first meeting was held on August 25, 1828. Every Saturday from seven to nine recitations of the Vedas, readings from the Upanishads, sermons on Vedic texts, the singing of hymns mostly composed by Roy himself and accompanied musically by a Mohammedan, took place.

himself correctly a "Hindu Unitarian," and did not hesitate to borrow from the two great unitarian religions, Islam and Christianity.[1] But he defended himself strenuously against the reproach of "eclecticism," and his disciples are agreed on that point. He held that doctrine ought to rest on original synthetic analysis, sounding the depths of religious experience. It is not then to be confounded with the monism of the Vedanta nor with Christian unitarianism. The theism of Roy claims to rest on two poles, the "absolute" Vedanta and the Encyclopædic thought of the eighteenth century—on the Formless God and Reason.

It was not easy to define and it was still less easy to realise after he had gone; for it implied a rare harmony of critical intelligence and faith going as far as the enlightenment of a noble mysticism consistently controlled and dominated by reason. Royally constituted physically and morally, he was able to attain the heights of contemplation without losing for an instant the balance of his everyday life or interrupting his daily course; he was protected against and disdainfully avoided the emotional excess to which the Bhaktas of Bengal were a prey.[2] It is not

[1] Ram Mohun Roy's Hindu Unitarianism is nearer to the Bible than the doctrines of his immediate successors at the head of the Brahmo Samaj, especially Devendranath Tagore.

[2] *Cf.* Dhirendranath Chowdhuri: "Ram Mohun Roy, the Devotee," *The Modern Review,* October 1928:

. . . . "the Raja would be frequently found absorbed (in Brahmasamadhi), all his distractions notwithstanding. . . . . For the Raja, Samadhi is not an abnormal physiological change of the body that can be effected at will, not unconsciousness generated as in sound sleep, but the highly spiritual culture

until we reach Aurobindo Ghose a century later that we find the same aristocratic freedom of diverse powers linked to the highest type of mind. It was not easily communicable and in fact proved impossible to communicate intact. Noble and pure though the successors of Ram Mohun Roy were, they changed his doctrine out of all recognition. Nevertheless the Constitution of the Brahmo Samaj—the *Magna Carta Dei*—which included such part as could be understood and assimilated by his successors, founded a new era in India and Asia and a century has merely proved the grandeur of its conception.

Roy emphasised its other practical aspect in his vigorous campaigns for social reform,[1] supported

of perceiving Brahman in *all* and the habit of surrendering the self to the higher self. Atmasakshatkar to him was not to deny the existence of the world . . . . but to perceive God in every bit of perception . . . . Ram Mohun was pre-eminently a Sadhaka. . . . Though a Vedantist in every pulse of his being, he did not fail to perceive that the Upanishads were not sufficient to satisfy the Bhakti hankerings of the soul, nor was he able to side with the Bhakti cult of Bengal. . . . . But he hoped that the needs of Bhakti would be met by the Sufis. . . . "

[1] We cannot attempt to give here a full list of his innumerable reforms or attempted reforms. Let it suffice to mention among the chief—Sati (the burning of widows), which he proved to be contrary to the sacred texts and which he persuaded the British Government to forbid in 1829, and his campaign against polygamy, his attempts to secure the remarriage of widows, inter-caste marriage, Indian unity, friendship between Hindus and Mussulmans, Hindu education, which he wished to model on the same scientific lines as Europe and for which he wrote in Bengali numerous text-books on Geography, Astronomy, Geometry, Grammar, etc., the education of women based on the example of ancient India, liberty of thought and of the Press, legal reforms, political equality, etc.

In 1821 he founded a Bengali newspaper, the father of

by the English administration, more liberal and more intelligent than that of to-day.[1] There was nothing parochial about his patriotism. He cared for nothing but liberty and civil and religious progress. Far from desiring the expulsion of England from India, he wished her to be established there in such a way that her blood, her gold and her thought would intermingle with the Indian, and not as a blood-sucking ghoul leaving her exhausted. He went so far as to wish his people to adopt English as their universal language, to make India Western socially and then to achieve independence and enlighten the rest of Asia. His newspapers were impassioned in the cause of liberty on behalf of all the nations of the world—Ireland, Naples crushed under reaction, revolutionary France in the July Days of 1830. But this loyal partisan of co-operation with England could speak frankly to her, and he did not conceal his intention of breaking with her if his great hopes of her as a leader in the advancement of his people were not realised.

Towards the end of 1830 the Emperor of Delhi sent him as his ambassador to England ; for Roy wished to be present at the debate in the Commons for the renewal of the Charter of the East India Company. He arrived in April, 1831, and was warmly received at Liverpool, at Manchester,

the native Press of India, a Persian paper, another paper called the *Ved Mandir* for the study of Vedic science. Moreover, India owes to him her first modern Hindu college and free schools, and ten years after his death the first school for women in Calcutta (1843).

[1] Ram Mohun Roy would never have been able to make headway against the violence of fanatical Brahmins nor to

at London and at Court. He made many illustrious friends, Bentham among their number, paid a short visit to France, and then died of brain fever at Bristol on September 27, 1833, where he is buried. His epitaph runs:

"A conscientious and steadfast believer in the Unity of Godhead: he consecrated his life with entire devotion to the worship of the Divine Spirit alone" or to use the language of Europe, its meaning being the same, "of Human Unity."

This man of gigantic personality, whose name to our shame is not inscribed in the Pantheon of Europe as well as of Asia, sank his ploughshare in the soil of India and sixty years of labour left her transformed. A great writer of Sanskrit, Bengali, Arabic, Persian and English, the father of modern Bengali prose, the author of celebrated hymns, poems, sermons, philosophic treatises and political and controversial writings of all kinds, he sowed his thoughts and his passion broadcast. And out of the earth of Bengal has come forth the harvest —a harvest of works and men.

And from his inspiration (a fact of supreme importance) sprang the Tagores.

*

The poet's grandfather, Dvarakanath Tagore, a friend of Ram Mohun Roy, was the chief supporter of the Brahmo Samaj after the latter's death;[1] Rabindranath's father, Devendranath Tagore (1817-1905), Roy's second successor after the inter-

realise certain of his most pressing social reforms without the friendship and support of the Governor-General, Lord William Bentinck.

[1] Dvarakanath, like Roy, died during a journey to England in 1846. This double death in the West is a sign of the

regnum of Ramchandra Vidyavagish, was the man who really organised the Brahmo Samaj. This noble figure, aureoled in history with the name of Saint (Maharshi) bestowed upon him by his people, merits some attempt at a short description.[1]

He had the physical and spiritual beauty, the high intellect, the moral purity, the aristocratic perfection, which he has bequeathed to his children. Moreover, he possessed the same deep and warm poetic sensibility.

Born at Calcutta, the eldest son of a rich family, brought up in orthodox traditions, his adolescence was exposed to the seductions of the world and the snares of pleasure, from which he was rescued by a visitation of death to his home. But he was to pass through a long moral crisis before he reached the threshold of religious peace. It is characteristic that his decisive advances were always the result of poetic emotions roused by some accidental happening : the wind that carried to him the name of Hari (Vishnu), chanted to a dying man on a night of full moon on the banks of the Ganges ; or the words of a boatman during a storm—"Be not afraid ! Forward !" or again the wind that blew a torn page of Sanskrit to his feet, whereon were written words from the Upanishads, which seemed to him the voice of God—"Leave

current carrying towards Europe the first pilots of the Brahmo Samaj.

[1] Devendranath left an autobiography in Bengali (translated into English by Satyendranath Tagore and Indira Devi, 1909, Calcutta), which gives the story of the long pilgrimage of his inner life from the deeps of illusion and superstition to the Spirit of the Living God, and is in reality the religious Journal of his soul.

Cf. an excellent little article by M. Durard in *Feuilles de*

all and follow Him! Enjoy his inexpressible riches. . . ."

In 1839 with his brothers and sisters and several friends he founded a Society for the propagation of the truths in which they believed. Three years later he joined the Brahmo Samaj and became its leading spirit. It was he who built up its faith and ritual. He organised its regular worship, founded a school of theology for the training of ministers, preached himself and in 1848 wrote in Sanskrit the *Brahmo Dharma,* "a theistic manual of religion and ethics for the edification of the faithful."[1] He himself considered that it was inspired.[2] The source of his inspiration, of quite a different order from that of Ram Mohun Roy, was almost entirely the Upanishads but subjected to a free interpretation.[3] Devendranath afterwards

l'Inde, 1st Volume, 1928, C. A. Hogman, editor, Boulogne-sur-Seine.

[1] An English translation has just been published by H. Chandra Sarkar. The *Brahmo Dharma* has had a large circulation in India, where it has been translated into different dialects.

[2] "It was the Truth of God that penetrated my heart. These living truths came down into my heart from Him who is the Life and the Light and the Truth." (Devendranath). He dictated the first part in three hours, and the whole of the treatise was produced "in the language of the Upanishads like a river; spiritual truths flowed through my mind by His grace." The danger with this process of inspired legislation, the natural expression of a man of Devendranath's temperament, is that, on the one hand, his Brahmo Samaj maintained that "Truth is the only eternal and imperishable scripture" and did not recognise any other holy book as scripture, and, on the other, that Truth rested on the authority of this inner outpouring which had issued in the last resort from several of the Hindu Scriptures, chosen and commented upon in a preconceived sense.

[3] Devendranath's attitude to the Holy Books was not

laid down the four articles of faith of the Brahmo Samaj :

1. In the beginning was nothing. The One Supreme Being alone existed. He created the universe.

2. He alone is the God of Truth, Infinite Wisdom, Goodness and power, Eternal and Omnipresent, the One without second.

3. Our salvation depends on belief in Him and in His worship in this world and the next.

4. Belief consists in loving Him and doing His will.

The faith of the Brahmo Samaj then is a faith in a *One God,* who *created the universe out of nothing,* and who is characterised essentially by the Spirit of Kindness, and whose absolute adoration is necessary for the salvation of man *in the next world.*

I have no means of judging whether this is as purely Hindu a conception as Devendranath thought it was. But it is interesting to note that the Tagore family belong to a community of Brahmins called Pirilis, or chief ministers, a post occupied by its members under the Mussulman regime. In a sense they were put outside caste by their relations with Mohammedans ;[1] it is, however, perhaps not too much to say that the persistent rigour of their theism has been due to this influence. From Dvarakanath to Rabindra-

always consistent. Between 1844 and 1846 at Benares he seems to have considered that the Vedas were infallible, but later after 1847 he abandoned this idea and individual inspiration gained the upper hand.

[1] *Cf.* Manjulal Dave : *The Poetry of Rabindranath Tagore,* 1927.

nath they have been the implacable enemies of all forms of idolatry.[1]

According to K. T. Paul, Devendranath had to wage a prolonged struggle, on the one hand, against the practices of orthodox Hinduism, and, on the other, against Christian propaganda which sought to gain a footing in the Brahmo Samaj. The need for defence led him to surround the citadel with a fortification of firm and right principles as picket posts. The bridge was raised between it and the two extremes of Indian religion —polytheism, which Devendranath strictly prohibited[2] and the absolute monism of Sankara ; for the Brahmo *Burg* was the stronghold of the great Dualism of the One and personal God and Human Reason, to whom God has granted the power and the right to interpret the Scriptures. I have already pointed out that in Devendranath's case and still more that of his successors, Reason had a tendency to be confused with religious inspiration. About 1860 from the depths of an eighteen months' retreat in the Himalayas near the Simla Hills he produced a garland of solitary medita-

[1] Over the door of Santiniketan, the home of the Tagores, an inscription runs: "In this place no image is to be adored." But it goes on to add: "And no man's faith is to be despised."

Islamic influences in the infancy of Ram Mohun Roy as well must always be borne in mind in considering the penetration of the Indian spirit with the current of monotheism.

[2] To such a degree that at his father's death in 1846 the eldest son, whose business it was to arrange the funeral ceremonies, refused to bow to family tradition because it included idolatrous rites. The scandal was so great that his family and friends broke with him. I must not linger over the years of noble trial which followed Devendranath devoted

tion.[1] These thoughts were later expanded into improvised sermons deeply moving to his Calcutta public. Further he bestowed upon the Brahmo Samaj a new liturgy inspired by the Upanishads and impregnated with an ardent and pure spirituality.

A short time after his return from the Himalayas in 1862 he adopted as his coadjutor Keshab Chunder Sen, a young man of twenty-three, who was destined to surpass him and to provoke a schism, or rather a series of schisms, in the Brahmo Samaj.

*

himself to the crushing task of paying back his father's creditors in full and of meeting all the engagements made by his prodigality, for he died heavily in debt.

[1] His young son, Rabindranath, accompanied him.

I love to associate with the magnificent memories of this impassioned retreat in the Himalayas, the wonderful appeal later addressed by Rabindranath to the "shepherd of the peoples":

"Ruler of peoples' minds and builder of India's destiny, Thy name arises in the sky from summits of the Himalayas and Vindhyas, flows in the stream of the Ganges and is sung by the surging sea.

"In Thy name wake Punjab and Sind, Maratha and Gujrat, Dravid, Utkal and Vanga. They gather at Thy feet asking for Thy blessing and singing Thy victory.

"Victory to Thee, Giver of good to all people, Victory to Thee, Builder of India's destiny.

"There sounds Thy call and they come before Thy throne the Hindus and Buddhists, the Jains and Sikhs, the Parsees, Mussulmans and Christians. The East and the West meet to unite their love at Thy shrine.

"Victory to Thee who makest one the minds of all people.

"Victory to Thee, Builder of India's destiny." (*The Fugitive*: "Call to the Fatherland.")

In point of fact Rabindranath profited by the wider thought given to the primitive Brahmo Samaj by Keshab Chunder Sen.

This man,[1] who only lived from 1838 to 1884, irresolute, restless but at the same time inspired, was the chief personality to influence the Brahmo Samaj during the second half of the nineteenth century. He enriched and renewed it to such an extent that he endangered its very existence.

He was the representative of a different class and generation much more deeply impregnated with Western influences. Instead of being a great aristocrat like Roy and Devendranath, he belonged to the liberal and distinguished middle class of Bengal, who were in constant intellectual touch with Europe. He belonged to the sub-caste of physicians. His grandfather, a remarkable man, a native secretary of the Asiatic Society, had control over the publication of all the editions of books

[1] For Keshab Chunder Sen, see

Pandit Gour Govindo Roy : Nine volumes have appeared of a biography in Bengali.

Pratap Chunder Mozoomdar (his chief disciple and successor) : *The Faith and Progress of the Brahmo Samaj*, 1882, Calcutta. *Aims and Principles of Keshab Chunder Sen*, 1889, Calcutta.

Promotho Loll Sen : *Keshab Chunder Sen, a Study*, 1902, new edition, 1915, Calcutta.

T. L. Vaswani. *Sri Keshab Chunder Sen, a Social Mystic*, 1916, Calcutta.

B. Mozoomdar, (President of the Keshab Mission Society) : *Professor Max Muller on Ramakrishna; the World on Keshab Chunder Sen*, 1900, Calcutta.

Manilal C. Parekh : *Brahmarshi Keshab Chunder Sen*, 1926, Rajkot, Oriental Christ House.

(This work by an Indian Christian disciple is the only one to show clearly Keshab's Christianity. It was at first tentative but gradually took possession of him more and more definitely and completely).

Keshab Chunder Sen : *A Voice from the Himalayas*, a collection of lectures delivered by Keshab at Simla in 1868, preceded by an introduction, 1927, Simla.

published in Hindustani. He was left an orphan at an early age, and was brought up in an English school. It was this that made him so different from his two predecessors; for he never knew Sanskrit and very soon broke away from the popular forms of the Hindu religion.[1] Christ had touched him, and it was to be his mission in life to introduce him into the Brahmo Samaj, and into the heart of a group of the best minds in India. When he died *The Indian Christian Herald* said of him: "The Christian Church mourns the death of its greatest ally. Christians looked upon him as God's messenger, sent to awake India to the spirit of Christ. Thanks to him hatred of Christ died out."

The last statement is not quite correct; for we shall see to what point Keshab himself had to suffer as the champion of Christ. The real significance of his life has been obscured by most of the men who have spoken of him even within the Brahmo Samaj; for they were offended by the heresy of their chief and tried to hide it. He himself only revealed it by degrees so that it is through documents written as long as twenty

[1] It is only natural that in spite of this fact he never lost the religious temperament peculiar to his race. Pratap Chunder Mozoomdar in the course of a conversation in 1884 with Ramakrishna related the mystic childhood of Keshab. (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*). He was early "marked by non-attachment to the things of this world" and absorbed in inward concentration and contemplation. "He was even subject to fits of loss of consciousness due to excess of devotion." He later applied the forms of Hindu religious "devotion" to non-Hindu religious objects. And the "Vaishnavited" form of Christianity he adopted was accompanied by a constant study of Yoga.

years before his death that we learn from his own lips that his life had been influenced from his youth up by three great Christian visitants, John the Baptist, Christ and St. Paul.[1] Moreover in a serious confidential letter to his intimate disciple, Pratap Chunder Mozoomdar,[2] a letter of primary importance passed over in silence by non-Christian Brahmos, he shows us how he was waiting until the time was ripe to make public avowal of his faith in Christ. The double life Keshab led for so long, was partly caused by the duality of his

[1] Easter, 1879; Lecture: *India Asks, Who is Christ?*

". . . My Christ, my sweet Christ, the brightest jewels of my heart, the necklace of my soul—for twenty years have I cherished Him in this my miserable heart."

January, 1879; Lecture: *Am I an Inspired Prophet?*

"What was it that made me so singular in the earlier years of my life? Providence brought me into the presence of three very singular persons in those days. They were among my soul's earliest acquiantances. I met three stately figures, heavenly, majestic, and full of divine radiance. . . . . (The first) John the Baptist was seen going about in the wilderness of India, saying, 'Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand'. . . . . I fell down at the feet of John the Baptist. . . . . He passed away, and then came another prophet far greater than he, the prophet of Nazareth. . . . . 'Take no thought for the morrow.' These words of Jesus found a lasting lodgment in my heart. Hardly had Jesus finished his words, when came another prophet, and that was the travelled ambassador of Christ, the strong, heroic and valiant Apostle Paul. . . And his words (relating to chastity) came upon me like a burning fire at a most critical period of my life."

It should be added that he had gained a knowledge of the New Testament at the English College, for a chaplain used to read it to the young people, translating it from the Greek.

[2] In this letter, whereon the exact date does not appear, but which it is safe to assume was written to Mozoomdar directly after his famous lecture in 1866 on *Jesus Christ, Europe and Asia*, Keshab explained himself thus:

". . . I have my own ideas about Christ, but I am not bound to give them out in due form, until altered circumstances

own character, compounded as it was of the diverse and incompatible elements of the East and the West, which were in constant conflict with each other. Hence it is very difficult for the historian to make an impartial study; Hindu biographers, in nearly every case hotly partizan, have done nothing to lighten his task.[1]

He was introduced to the Brahmo Samaj by Devendranath Tagore's son, a student of the same college, and during the early days of his admission, young Keshab was surrounded with love. He became the darling of Devendranath and of the young members of the Brahmo Samaj, who felt themselves drawn into closer contact with him than with the noble Devedranath, dwelling in spite of himself in Olympian isolation as the result of his breeding and idealism.[2] Keshab had a

of the country gradually develop them out of my mind. Jesus is identical with self-sacrifice and as He lived and preached in the fulness of time, so must He be in turn preached in the fulness of time. . . . . I am, therefore, patiently waiting that I may grow with the age and the nation and the spirit of Christ's sacrifice may grow therewith." (*Cf.* Manilal C. Parekh : *op. cit.*, pp. 29-31).

[1] The author does not attempt to hide his grudge against these historians ; for nearly all of them seem to consider history as a mass of material wherein one is at liberty to choose only those facts which serve to plead a personal cause, and systematically to ignore the rest. (This is apart from the superb indifference to scientific exactitude, which characterises all Hindu historians : it is a miracle if a few dates can be gleaned here and there : even when they do appear they have been scattered with such careless hand that it is impossible to rely upon them.) This short dissertation on Keshab's personality and its development has had to be rewritten three times, after the discovery of essential points, either omitted or twisted out of all recognition by his accredited Indian biographers.

[2] "Devendranath was too preoccupied by his personal

social sense and wished to rouse the same feeling throughout India. A hyper-individualist by nature and doubtless just because this was the case,[1] he early in life recognised that part of the evils of his country arose out of this same hyper-individualism, and that India needed to acquire a new moral conscience. "Let all souls be socialised and realised their unity with the people, the visible community." This conception, uniting[2] the aristocratic unitarianism of Roy to the Indian masses, put young Keshab into communion with the most ardent aspirations of the rising generation. Just as Vivekananda in after days (Vivekananda

relationship to God to feel more than moderately the call of social responsibilities." (From a letter of a friend of the Tagores).

[1] His chief disciple, Pratap Chunder Mozoomdar, said that he constantly struggled against the flights of his mystic nature, and that "he always succeeded in containing them" (a fact which is not altogether true); for the great object of his life was to bring religion within the reach of heads of families, "in other words to re-establish it in ordinary everyday life." This was one of the sources of those contradictions in his character, which compromised his work. He attempted to reconcile the irreconcilable—the mystic upspringing natural to him, and the canalisation of the divine stream for the moral and social service of the community—Theocentrism and anthropocentrism, to use the language of Western mysticism as analysed by the able Henri Bremond. Both of them, moreover, in the case of Keshab existed in the highest degree. But his rich nature, too plastic, too perpetually receptive to all spiritual foods offered for the satisfaction of his appetite, which was greater than his faculty for absorption, made him a living contradiction. It is said that while at College he played the part of Hamlet in a performance of Shakespeare's play. In point of fact he remained the young prince of Denmark to the end of his life.

[2] In theory at least. In practice Keshab never succeeded in touching the masses. His thought was too impregnated with elements alien to the thought of India.

incidentally owed him a great deal without perhaps realising it; for ideas are the natural outcome of the age and are born at the same time in different minds), Keshab believed religion to be necessary for the regeneration of the race. In an address at Bombay in 1868 he maintained that he wished to make it "the basis of social reforms." Hence religious reform within the Brahmo Samaj was to bear fruit in action. Keshab's active, but somewhat restless hand was therefore to be seen casting into the soil of India, a handful of fruitful seeds, which in his turn Vivekananda[1] sowed broadcast with powerful arm upon the mother-country already awakened by the thunder of his words.

But Keshab came before his time. Some of his reforms even came up against the traditional spirit of the Brahmo Samaj. It has been generally considered that the stumbling-block between him and Devendranath was the question of inter-caste marriages, but I am certain that there were others far more important. Their mutual affection has drawn a veil over the causes of their separation, but from what happened immediately afterwards, they can be surmised. However open Devendranath's mind might be to the great ideal of constructing the harmony of humanity through the Brahmo Samaj, he remained deeply attached to

[1] A great many social institutions were eventually founded by Keshab for the service of the people: Night Schools, Industrial Schools, the Calcutta College, the Normal School for Indian Women, a soceity for the help of women, the Indian Association of Reform, the Fraternity of Goodwill, numerous Samajas, etc.

Indian tradition and her sacred Writings.[1] He could not be blind to the Christianity working in the mind of his favourite disciple, and at whatever personal cost, he could no longer remain in association with a coadjutor who based his teachings on the New Testament.

In 1866 the fatal rupture took place, and there was a schism in the Brahmo Samaj. Devendranath kept the direction of the Adi Brahmo Samaj (the first Brahmo Samaj),[2] and Keshab departed to found the Brahmo Samaj of India. For both men this was a severe trial, but especially for Keshab, whose heresy made him hated. At first he did not forsee this contingency. Strong in his popularity and the ardent support of his faithful friends, three months after the break he made a public declaration in his famous lecture on *Jesus Christ, Europe and Asia*.[3] There he professed

[1] B. Mozoomdar said: "Tht Brahmo Samaj of Devendranath was in theory eclectic, but in fact purely Hindu in character." My friend, Prof. Kalidas Nag, who is connected with the Tagores by ties of affection, wrote to me: "Devendranath could not bear radical changes. He rendered full justice to the West, and highly appreciated Fenelon, Fichte and Victor Cousin. But he could not tolerate aggressive demonstrations of fanatical zeal. Keshab was a zealot, who wished to lead his disciples in a veritable crusade against India's social evils."

[2] It was not long before Devendranath retired from active life. He went to live in a self-chosen retreat at Bolpur, near Calcutta, to which he gave the name of Santiniketan, the Abode of Peace. There he spent the rest of his life in an atmosphere of aristocratic sanctity and died in 1905, a patriarch in the midst of his royal posterity.

[3] It is obvious that Devendranath knew of this imminent confession of faith when he separated from Keshab. At that time Keshab was deep in the study of Christianity, and in particular occupied in reading a book which had a great vogue at that time—Seeley's *Ecce Homo*.

Christ, but an Asiatic Christ little understood by Europe, clothed in "all the grandeur of which the Asiatic nature is susceptible." His Christianity was still in the main a question of ethics. Keshab was attracted by the morality of Christ and his two principles of pardon and self-sacrifice. Through these principles and through Him he maintained that "Europe and Asia may learn to find harmony and unity."

His ardour as a neophyte was such that he made his friends call him Jesudas, or the servant of Jesus, and he celebrated Christmas by a fast within a small circle of intimate friends.

But the lecture had created a scandal, and Keshab did not improve matters by a second speech upon *Great Men* (1866).[1] Therein, if I may use such an expression, he made Jesus come into line among the messengers of God, each one of whom was charged with his own special message, and was to be accepted without special attachment to any single one. He threw open his Church to men of all countries and all ages, and introduced for the first time extracts from the Bible, the Koran, the Zend Avesta[2] into the manual of devotional lessons for the use of the Brahmo Samaj. But far from dying down, feeling ran higher.

[1] It is perhaps worthy of notice that among the youthful readings of Keshab none impressed him more than the works of Carlyle and Emerson.

[2] This manual, called the *Slokasangraha* (1866), though a great deal larger than Devendranath's, never had such a wide circulation in India as the *Brahmo Dharma*. Nevertheless Keshab followed the true tradition of Roy when he said that "the harmony of religions was the real mission of the Brahmo Samaj."

Keshab was not the man to be unmoved by it. His sensitive and defenceless heart suffered more than most from disaffection. Public misunderstanding, the desertion of his companions, heavy material difficulties, and over and above all the torments of his own conscience, perhaps even doubts as to his mission, added to "a very lively sense of weakness, of sin and of repentance" peculiarly his own as distinct from most of the other religious spirits of Hinduism,[1] resulted in a devastating crisis of soul, which lasted throughout 1867. He was alone with his grief, without any outside help, alone with God. But God spoke to him, so that the religious experience of that year when he was racked by conflicting emotions, as he daily officiated as divine priest by himself in his house, led to a complete transformation not only in his ideas but in their expression. Up till then he had been the chief among religious intellectuals, a moralist, a stranger to sentimental effusions, which had been repellent to him ; but now he was flooded by a torrent of emotion—love and tears—and gave himself up to it in rapture.

This was the dawn of a new era for the Brahmo Samaj. The mysticism of the great Bhakta, Chaitanya, and the Sankirtans were introduced within its walls. From morning till

[1] It is P. C. Mozoomdar who noted in him this "sense of sin," so curiously at variance with the spirit of Devendranath as well as Ramakrishna and above all of Vivekananda. We shall see later that Vivekananda denounced it as evidence of a weak disposition, a real mental malady, for which he threw the blame on Christianity. The state of mind that Keshab systematically cultivated culminated in a sermon delivered in 1881 : *We Apostles of the New Dispensation,* where he likened himself to Judas, much to the scandal of his hearers.

night there were prayers and hymns accompanied by Vaishnavite musical instruments, and feasts of God[1]; and Keshab officiated at them all, his face bathed in tears—he, who, it was said, had never wept. The wave of emotion spread. Keshab's sincerity, his spirit of universal comprehension and his care for the public weal brought him the sympathy alike of the best minds of India and England, including the Viceroy. His journey to England in 1870 was a triumphal progress. The enthusiasm he roused was equal to that inspired by Kossuth. During his six months' stay[2] he addressed seventy meetings of 40,000 persons and fascinated his audiences by the simplicity of his English and by his musical voice. He was compared to Gladstone. He was greeted as the spiritual ally of the West, the Evangelist of Christ in the East. In all good faith both sides were labouring under delusions, destined to be dissipated during the following years, not without a naive deception of the English. For Keshab remained deeply Indian at heart and was not to be enrolled in the ranks of European Christianity. On the other hand, he thought he could enrol it. India and the Brahmo

[1] It is noticeable that on this occasion there was no question of Christ. The Bhakti of Chaitanya is another aspect of Keshab's religion. "Thus," wrote P. C. Mozoomdar, "Keshab stood at the threshold of his independent career with the shadow of Jesus on the one hand, and the shadow of Chaitanya on the other." His enemies took account of it in 1884 when some of them reported maliciously to Ramakrishna that Keshab had claimed to be "a partial incarnation of Christ and Chaitanya."

[2] He came to know Gladstone, Stuart Mill, Max Muller, Francis Newman, Dean Stanley, etc. personally.

Samaj profited from the good disposition of the Government.[1] In its reconstituted form, it spread in all directions, to Simla, Bombay, Lahore, Lucknow, Monghyr, etc. A mission tour undertaken by Keshab across India in 1873 with the object of bringing about unity among the brothers and sisters of the new faith, a tour which was the forerunner of the great voyage of exploration undertaken twenty years later by Vivekananda in the guise of a wandering Sannyasin. The tour opened up new horizons and he believed that he had found the key to popular polytheism, so repugnant to the Brahmo Samaj, and that he could make an alliance between it and pure theism. But to this union, realised spontaneously by Ramakrishna at the same time, Keshab brought a spirit of intellectual compromise.* He was obliged to convince himself (he failed to convince the polytheists) that their gods were at bottom nothing but the names of different attributes of the one God.

"Their (Hindu) idolatry," he wrote in *The Sunday Mirror*,[2] "is nothing but the worship of divine attributes materialised. If the material shape is given up, what remains is a beautiful allegory. . . . We have found out that every idol worshipped by the Hindu represents an attribute of God, and that each attribute is called by a peculiar name. The believer in the New Dispensation is required to worship God as the

[1] Especially in the case of several reforms, among them a legislative one directly concerning the Brahmo Samaj—the legal recognition of Brahmo marriages.

* See *Note II*, at the end of the volume.—*Publisher.*

[2] August 1, 1880: "The Philosophy of Idol-worship."

possessor of all those attributes, represented by the Hindu as innumerable, or three hundred and thirty millions. To believe in an undivided Deity, without reference to the aspects of His nature is to believe in an abstract God, and it would lead us to practical rationalism and infidelity. If we are to worship Him in all His manifestations, we shall name one attribute Lakshmi, another Saraswati, another Mahadeva, etc., etc. . . . ."

This meant a great step forward in religious comprehension, embracing as it did the greater part of mankind. But it never came to anything because Keshab intended that his Theism should have all the real power and polytheism was to receive nothing but outward honour. On the other hand, he avoided Advaitism, absolute Monism, which has always been forbidden to the Brahmo. The result was that religious reason sat on the fence separating the two camps of the two extreme faiths. The prevailing situation was not an exact equilibrium of rest, and the position in which Keshab insisted on placing himself could not be a permanent one. For he believed that he was called by God to dictate His new revealed law, the New Dispensation, from thence. He began to proclaim it in 1875,[1] the year when his relations with Ramakrishna began.

Like so many self-appointed legislators, he found it difficult to establish law and order in his own mind, especially as he wished his legislation to be all-embracing and to include Christ and Brahman, the Gospels and Yoga, religion and

[1] In the Lecture : *Behold the light of Heaven in India.*

reason. Ramakrishna reached the same point in all simplicity through his heart, and made no attempt to fence his discovery within a body of doctrine and precept ; he was content to show the way, to set the example, to give the impetus. Keshab adopted at the same time the methods of an intellectual European at the head of a school of comparative religion, and the methods of inspired persons of India and America—Bhakti in tears, Revivals and public confessions.

He gave to each of his favourite disciples a different form of religion to study[1] and Yoga to practise.[2] His skill as a teacher was shown in choosing for each disciple the one best adapted to his individual character. He himself oscillated between two advisors, both equally dear to him

[1] Each of his four chosen disciples dedicated himself to a lifelong study of one of the four great religions, and in some cases was absorbed into the subject of his study : Upadhyaya Gour Govindo Roy was given Hinduism and produced a monumental work, a Sanskrit commentary on the Gita, and a life of Sri Krishna : Sadhu Aghore Nath studied Buddhism, and wrote a life of Buddha in Bengali, following in his footsteps until he was cut off in the prime of a saintly life : Bhai Girish Chunder Sen, devoted himself to Islam, translated the Koran and wrote a life of Mahomet and several other works in Arabic and Persian. Finally Pratap Chunder Mozoomdar studied Christianity and published a book called *The Oriental Christ*. He was so impregnated with its spiritual atmosphere that real Indan Christians, such as Manilal C. Parekh, sprang from the school of thought he founded.

[2] After January 1, 1875, when he inaugurated the new method of spiritual development usually called the Dispensation, he varied the parts of the soul (Yogas) according to the character of his disciples, recommending Bhakti to some, Jnana to others, Raja to others. The different forms of devotion were linked together by the different names or attributes of God. (*Cf.* P. C. Mozoomdar). I shall return to this point in my second volume when I study Hindu mysticism and the different kinds of Yoga.

—the living example of Ramakrishna to whom he went for guidance in ecstasy, and the precepts of the Christian faith as practised by an Anglican monk, who later became a Roman Catholic, Luke Rivington. Moreover he could never choose between the life of God and the life of the world, and with disarming sincerity he maintained that the one was not necessarily harmful to the other.[1]

But the confusion of his mind wronged him and reacted on the Brahmo Samaj, all the more because he was a man "of the most transparent sincerity,"[2] who neglected the most elementary precautions to conceal the changeableness and heterogeneity of his nature. The result was a new schism in the Brahmo Samaj in 1878, and Keshab found himself the butt of violent attacks from his own people, who accused him of having betrayed his principles.[3] The majority of his friends deserted him and so he fell inevitably into the hands of the few faithful ones that remained —Ramakrishna and Father Luke Rivington.

1 His well-wishers such as Ramakrishna, did not fail to remark with a touch of malice that this saintly man left his affairs in good order and a rich house, etc., when he died. Keshab did not renounce the pleasures of society, he took an active part in amusements and played in the dramas acted in his house. (*Cf. The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,* April, 1884.) But Ramakrishna never doubted his sincerity. It was unimpeachable. He only regretted that such a religious and gifted man should remain half way to God instead of giving himself entirely to Him.

2 Promotho Loll Sen : *op. cit.*

3 The occasion was a domestic one, the marriage of his daughter before the age established by the law of the Brahmo Samaj to a Maharaja. But here again, as in the schism with Devendranath, the real cause was hidden. A third Brahmo Samaj was founded, the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, more narrow and definitely anti-Christian.

Moreover this new trial reopened the door to a whole flood of professions of the Christian faith, which became more and more explicit and in accordance with the deepest metaphysics of Christianity. Thus in the lecture *Am I an Inspried Prophet?* (January 1879), he described his childish vision of John the Baptist, Christ and St. Paul; in *India Asks, Who is Christ?* (Easter 1879), he announced to India the coming of "the Bridegroom . . . . my Christ, my sweet Christ, born of God and man;"[1] and in *Does God Manifest Himself Alone?* he[2] showed the Son sitting on the right hand of the Father.

All these pronouncements, however, did not hinder him from dictating at the same time from the heights of the Himalayas his famous *Epistle to Indian Brethren* (1880) for the jubilee of the Brahmo Samaj, announcing in a pontifical tone "Urbi et Orbi,"[3] the Message entrusted to him by

[1] "My Master Jesus. . . . Young men of India. . . . Believe and remember. . . . He will come to you as self-surrender, as asceticism, as Yoga. . . . . The Bridegroom cometh. . . . . Let India, beloved India, be dressed in all her jewellery."

Again Keshab declared in his articles in *The Indian Mirror*: "What the Brahmo Samaj did to clear the moral character of Christ more than twelve years ago, it does with respect to His divinity at the present day." (April 20, 1879). There were no half measures about this. Christ was God.

And again: "The Mosaic dispensation only? Perhaps the Hindu dispensation also. In India He will fulfil the Hindu dispensation."

[2] This lecture followed and completed another: *God-vision in the Nineteenth Century*, wherein Keshab in his homage to science, is a forerunner of Vivekananda, who has joined heaven and earth.

[3] *Urbi et Orbi*:—that is to say, the City (Rome) and the world (like the Roman Pope).

God, the New Dispensation. One might believe that the words came out of the Bible :

"Hearken, Oh Hindustan, the Lord your God is one,"

So begins the *Epistle to the Indian Brethren.*

"Jehovah the great spirit, whose clouds thunder 'I am', whom the heavens and the earth declare. . . ."

"I write this epistle to you, dear and beloved friends, in the spirit and after the manner of St. Paul, however unworthy I am of his honoured Master. . . ."

But he adds :

"Paul wrote full of faith in Christ. As a thiest I write to you this, my humble epistle, at the feet, not of one prophet only, but of all the prophets in heaven and earth, living or dead. . . ."

For he claimed to be the fulfilment of Christ the forerunner.

"The New Dispensation is the prophecy of Christ fulfilled. . . . The Omnipotent speaks today to our country as formerly he did to other nations. . . ."[1]

At this moment he even believed that he was formed of the same stuff as the Spirit of God.

"The Spirit of God and my inner self are knit together. If you have seen me, you have seen Him. . . ."

What then does the Omnipotent, whose voice he is, have to declare ? What "new Love, new Hope, new Joy does He bring ? ("How sweet is this new Evangel !")

[1] *Cf.* sermon : *Behold the Light of Heaven in India* (1875).

This is what Jehovah as God of India dictates to the new Moses :

"The Infinite Spirit, whom no eye hath seen, and no ear hath heard, is your God, and you should have none other God. There are two false gods, raised by men of India in opposition to the All Highest—the Divinity which ignorant hands have fashioned, and the Divinity which the vain dreams of intellectuals have imagined are alike the enemy of our Lord.[1] You must abjure them both. . . . Do not adore either dead matter, or dead men, or dead abstractions. . . . Adore the living Spirit, who sees without eyes. . . . The communion of the soul with God and with the departed saints shall be your true heaven, and you must have none other. . . . In the spiritual exaltation of the soul find the joy and the holiness of heaven. . . . Your heaven is not far away ; it is within you. You must honour and love all the ancients of the human family—prophets, saints, martyrs, sages, apostles, missionaries, philanthropists of all ages and all countries without caste prejudice. Let not the holy men of India monopolise your affection and your homage ! Render to all prophets the devotion and universal affection that is their due. . . . Every good and great man is the personification of some special element of Truth and Divine Goodness. Sit

[1] The first Divinity condemned is easy to define, the idols of wood, metal and stone. The second is further defined by "the unseen idols of modern scepticism, abstractions, unconscious evolution, blind protoplasm, etc." This then is scientific or rational or Advaitist intellectualism. But Keshab was far from condemning real science as is shown by his lecture on *God-vision in the Nineteenth Century* (1879).

humbly at the feet of all heavenly messengers. . . . . Let their blood be your blood, their flesh your flesh ! . . . . Live in them and they will live in you for ever ! "

Nothing more noble can be imagined. This is the very highest expression of universal theism ; and it comes very close to the free theism of Europe without any forced act of allegiance to revealed religion. It opens its arms to all the purified spirits of the whole earth, past, present and future ; for the Gospel of Keshab does not claim to be the final word of the revelation. " The Indian Scriptures are not closed.[1] New chapters are added every year. . . . Go ever further in the love and the knowledge of God ! . . . . What the Lord will reveal to us in ten years' time who can say, except Himself ? "

But how is this free and broad theism with its serene and assured tone to be reconciled to his abasement at the feet of Christ in the previous year ?[2]

" I must tell you . . . . that I am connected with Jesus' Gospel, and occupy a prominent place in it. I am the prodigal son of whom Christ spoke and I am trying to return to my Father in a penitent spirit. Nay, I will say more for the satisfaction and edification of my opponents. . . . I am Judas, that vile man who betrayed Jesus. . . . the veritable Judas who sinned against the truth. And Jesus lodges in my heart ! . . ."

[1] A favourite idea of Vivekananda may be recognised therein.
[2] In the sermon : *We, the Apostles of the New Dispensation* (1881).

The overwhelming effect of such a public confession on those members of the Brahmo Samaj, who had followed their chief up to that point,[1] may be imagined.

But Keshab was still debating with himself. He professed Christ but he denied that he was a "Christian."[2] He tried to unite Christ to Socrates and to Chaitanya in a strange way by thinking of each of them as a part of his body or of his mind.[3] Nevertheless he instituted the sacramental ceremonies of Christianity in his Samaj, adapting them to Indian usage. On March 6, 1881, he celebrated the Blessed Sacrament with rice and water instead of bread and wine,[4] and three months later the

[1] That is why their writings about Keshab are very careful (as far as I know) to make no mention of such an avowal.

[2] "Honour Christ but never be 'Christian' in the popular acceptation of the term. . . . Christ is not Christianity. . . . Let it be your ambition to outgrow the popular types of narrow Christian faith and merge in the vastness of Christ!"

In an article of the same period called "Other Sheep have I":

"We belong to no Christian sect. We disclaim the Christian name. Did the immediate disciples of Christ call themselves Christian? . . . Whoso believes in God and accepts Christ as the Son of God has fellowship with Christ in the Lord . . . . How explicit is that well-known passage—'And other sheep I have.' We, the Gentiles of the New Dispensation, are the other sheep. The shepherd knows us. . . . Christ has found us and accepted us. . . That is enough. Is any Christian greater than Christ?"

[3] "The Lord Jesus is my will, Socrates my head, Chaitanya my heart, the Hindu Rishi my soul and the philanthropic Howard my right hand."

[4] Keshab read a verse from St. Luke, and he prayed "that the Holy Spirit might turn their grossly material substance into sanctifying spiritual forces so that upon entering our system they might be assimilated to it as the flesh and blood of all the saints in Christ Jesus."

sacrament of baptism, wherein Keshab himself set the example, glorifying the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost.

Finally in 1882 he took the decisive step. The Christian Trinity of all Christian mysteries has always been the greatest stumbling-block for Asia, and an object of repulsion or derision.[1] Keshab not only accepted and adopted it, but extolled it with gladness[2] and was enlightened by it. This mystery seemed to him, and certainly not without reason, to be the keynote of the arch of Christian metaphysics, the supreme conception of the universe . . . . "the treasury in which lies the accumulated wealth of the world's sacred literature—all that is precious in philosophy, theology, and poetry (of all humanity) . . . . the loftiest expression of the world's religious consciousness. . . ." He defines the three Persons very exactly, I believe, from an orthodox point of view.[3] Did anything still separate him from Christianity ?

[1] The reason for this is obscure as regards Vedantic India, for she also has her Trinity, and Keshab rightly made it approach the Christian Trinity :—"Sat, Chit, Ananda" (Being, Knowledge, Happiness, which Keshab translated by Truth, Wisdom and Joy) the three in one : Satchidananda.

[2] In a lecture of 1882 : *That Marvellous Mystery, the Trinity.*

[3] "Here you have the complete triangular figure of the Trinity. . . . The apex is the very God Jehovah. . . . From Him comes down the Son . . . and touches one end of the base of humanity . . . . and then by the power of the Holy Ghost drags up degenerate humanity to Himself. Divinity coming down to humanity is the Son, Divinity carrying humanity to heaven is the Holy Ghost ; this is the whole philosophy of salvation. . . . The Creator, the Exemplar, and the Sanctifier, I am, I love, I save ; the Still God, the Journeying God, the Returning God. . . . ."—*Keshab. Cf.* the treatises of classical Catholic mysticism :

Only one thing but it was a world in itself—his own message, the Indian "Dispensation." He could never bring himself to renounce it. He indeed adopt Christ, but Christ in His turn had to adopt India and the theism of Keshab. "Begone, idolatry! Preachers of idol-worship, adieu!" (This apostrophe was addressed to the West.) Christ is the eternal Word. "As sleeping Logos Christ lived potentially in the Father's bosom, long, long before he came into this world of ours." He appeared before his physical life in Greece and Rome, in Egypt and in India, in the poets of the Rig-Veda, as well as in Confucius and Sakya-Muni; and the role of this Indian apostle of the New Dispensation was to proclaim his true and universal meaning. For after the Son came the Spirit and "this Church of the New Dispensation . . . . is altogether an institution of the Holy Spirit" and completes the Old and the New Testaments.

And so no part of this Himalayan theism was

"The action whereby the Father engenders the Son is well explained by the term issuing or coming out. . . . *Exivi a Patre.* The Holy Ghost is produced by the return way. . . . It is the divine way and subsists in God whereby God returns to himself. . In the same way we come out of God by the creation, which is attributed to the Father by the Son, we return to him by grace, which is the attribute of the Holy Ghost."

(P. Claude Seguenot: *Conduite d'Oraison*, 1634, quoted by Henri Bremond: *La Metaphysique des Saints*, I, pp. 116-117).

Surprising though it may seem Keshab knew the Berullian or Salesian philosophy of prayer.* In a note of June 30, 1881, on the "Renunciation of John the Baptist," he quotes letters of Francois de Sales to Madame de Chantal.

* Berullian or Salesian,—that is to say, belonging to Berulle or Francois de Sales, great French Catholic mystics of the seventeenth century.

lost in spite of rude shocks from above and below, which might well have undermined its citadel. By a violent effort of thought, Keshab achieved the incorporation of Christ within it, and covered his own New Dispensation with the name of Christ, believing that he was called to reveal the real meaning of Christ to Western Christianity.

This was the avowed object of Keshab's last message before his death, *Asia's Message to Europe* (1883). "Sectarian and carnal Europe, put up into the scabbard the sword of your narrow faith! Abjure it and join the true Catholic and Universal Church in the name of Christ, the Son of God! . . . ."

"Christian Europe has not understood one half of Christ's words. She has comprehended that Christ and God are one, but not that Christ and humanity are one. That is the great mystery, which the New Dispensation reveals to the world: not only the reconciliation of man with God; but the reconciliation of man with man! . . . . Asia says to Europe: 'Sister, be one in Christ! . . . . All that is good and true and beautiful—the meekness of Hindu Asia, the truthfulness of the Mussulman and the charity of the Buddhist—all that is holy is of Christ. . . .'"

And the new Pope of the new Rome in Asia intones the beautiful Song of Atonement.[1]

[1] "And the new Song of Atonement is sung with enthusiasm by millions of voices, representing all the various languages of the world. Millions of souls, each dressed in its national garb of piety and righteousness, glowing in an infinite and complete variety of colours, shall dance round and round the Father's throne, and peace and joy shall reign for ever."

But he was a real Pope, and the unity of reconciled mankind had to be according to his doctrine ; in order to defend it he always kept the thunderbolt in his hand, and he refused all compromise on the subject of the unitheistic principle—the Unity of God.

" Science is one. The Church is one."

His disciple, B. Mozoomdar, makes him use the denunciatory words of Christ, but more violently :

" There is only one way. There is no backdoor into heaven. He who enters not by the front door is a thief and a robber."

This is the antithesis of the smiling words of kindness uttered by Ramakrishna.[1]

The innate need of unitarian discipline which does not tally with religious universalism and often unwittingly merges into spiritual imperialism, led Keshab at the end of his life to lay down the code of the New Samhita[2] (September 2, 1883), containing what he calls " the national law of the Aryans of the New Church in India. . . . God's moral law adapted to the peculiar needs and character of

[1] One day when the young Naren (Vivekananda) denounced certain religious sects with his customary impatience, because their practices roused his furious disgust, Ramakrishna looked at him tenderly and said : " My boy, there is a backdoor to every house. Why should not one have the liberty to enter into a house by that if one chooses to ? But, of course, I agree with you that the front entrance is the best."

And the biographer of Ramakrishna adds that these simple words " modified his Puritanical view of life, which he as a Brahmo had held. Sri Ramakrishna taught Naren how to regard mankind in the more generous and truer light of weakness and of strength (and not of sin or virtue)." (*The Life of Swami Vivekananda,* Vol. I, Chapter XLVII).

[2] Samhita means collection or miscellany.

reformed Hindus, and based upon their national instincts and traditions." It contains in effect a national unitarianism—one God, one scripture, one baptism, one marriage—a whole code of injunctions for the family, for the home, for business, for study, for amusement, for charity, for relationships, etc. But his code is a purely abstract one for an India that had not yet come into existence, and whose advent is doubtful.

Was he himself sure that it would ever come? The entire edifice of voluntary reason rested on uncertain foundations, on a nature divided between East and West. When illness came[1] the cement was loosened. To whom was his soul to belong, Christ or Kali? On his deathbed Ramakrishna, Devendranath—his old master to whom he was now reconciled, and the Bishop of Calcutta all visited him. On January 1, 1884, he went out for the last time to consecrate a new sanctuary to the Divine Mother, but on January 8, his deathbed was enveloped in the words of a hymn sung at his own request by one of his disciples about Christ's agony in Gethsemane.

It was impossible for a nation of simple souls to find their way amid such a constant mental oscillation. But it makes Keshab nearer and more appealing to us, who can study his most intimate thoughts and can see the mental torture accompanying it. It is also true that the kind and penetrating vision of Ramakrishna understood better than anybody else the hidden tragedy of a being exhausting itself in searching after God,

[1] Diabetes, one of the scourges of Bengal, of which Vivekananda also died

whose body was the prey of the unseen God.[1] But has a born leader any right, even if he keeps his anguish to himself, to yield to such oscillations in his very last hours? They were his legacy to the Brahmo Samaj; and though they enriched its spirit they weakened its authority in India for a long time, if not for ever. We may well ask with Max Muller[2] whether the logical outcome of his theism was not to be found in Christianity; and that is exactly what Keshab's friends and enemies felt immediately after his death.

His obsquies united in common grief the official representatives of the best minds both of England and of Westernised India. "He was the chain of union between Europe and India;" and the chain once broken, could not be resoldered. None of

[1] I shall have more to say about the last touching visit of Ramakrishna to Keshab and the profound words he poured out like balm on the hidden wounds of the dying man.

[2] Max Muller in 1900, asked Pratap Chunder Mozoomdar, who had taken Keshab's place at the head of the Brahmo Samaj and who shared the "Christocentric" ideas of his master, why the Brahmo Samaj did not frankly adopt the name Christian and did not organise itself as a national Church of Christ. The idea found a response in P. C. Mozoomdar himself and a group of his young disciples. One of them, Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya, deserves a special study, for he has left a great memory. He passed from the Church of the New Dispensation to the Anglican and eventually to the Roman Catholic Communion. Another is Manilal C. Parekh, the biographer of Keshab, also a convert to Christianity. Both are convinced that if Keshab had lived several years longer he would have entered the Roman Church. Manilal Parekh says "that he was a Protestant in principle and a Catholic in practice. . . . Christian in spirit inclining to Monatism (faith in the supremacy of the Holy Spirit)." For myself I believe that Keshab was one of those who would have remained at the threshold of the half open door. But it was fatal that his successors opened the door wide.

the subsequent moral and religious leaders of India have so sincerely given their adherence to the heart and spirit of the thought and the God of the West.[1] Hence Max Muller could write : "India has lost her greatest son." But the Indian Press, while unanimous in acclaiming his genius, was forced to admit that "the number of his disciples was not in accordance with his desert."[2]

He was in fact too far away from the deep-seated soul of his people. He wished to raise them all at once to the pure heights of his intellect, which had been itself nourished by the idealism and the Christ of Europe. In social matters none of his predecessors, with the exception of Roy, had done so much for her progress; but he ran counter to the rising tide of national consciousness, then feverishly awakening. Against him were the three hundred million gods of India and three hundred million living beings in whom they were incarnate—the whole vast jungle of human dreams wherein his Western outlook made him miss the track and the scent. He invited them to lose themselves in his Indian Christ, but his

[1] *The Indian Empire* saluted in him "the best product of English education and Christian civilisation in India." And *The Hindu Patriot,* "the noble product of the education and the culture of the West."

From the Indian point of view such praise was its own condemnation.

[2] *The Hindu Patriot.* In 1921 the total number of the members of the three Brahmo Samajas was not more than 6,400 (of which 4,000 were in Bengal, Assam and Behar-Orissa), a minute number in comparison to the members of the Arya Samaj, of which I shall speak later, or of the new sects purely mystical, such as the Radhasvami-Satsang.

invitation remained unanswered. They did not even seem to have heard it.

*

Indian religious thought raised a purely Indian Samaj against Keshab's Brahmo Samaj and against all attempt at Westernisation, even during his lifetime, and at its head was a personality of the highest order, Dayananda Sarasvaty[1] (1824-1883).

This man with the nature of a lion is one of those, whom Europe is too apt to forget when she judges India, but whom she will probably be forced to remember to her cost ; for he was that rare combination, a thinker of action with a genius for leadership, like Vivekananda[2] after him.

While all the religious leaders of whom we have already spoken and shall speak in the future were and are from Bengal, Dayananda came from quite a different land, the one which half a century later gave birth to Gandhi—the northwest coast of the Arabian Sea. He was born in Gujarat at Morvi in the State of Kathiawar, of a rich family belonging

[1] His real name, abandoned by himself, was Mulshankar. Sarasvaty was the surname of his Guru, whom he regarded as his true father. For Dayananda's life it is necessary to consult the classical book of Lajpat Rai (the great nationalist Indian leader, who has just died) : *The Arya Samaj*, with an introduction by Sidney Webb, Longmans, Green & Co., London, 1915.

[2] But although the energy of the two men, the immense power of their preaching and their irresistible attraction for the masses were equal, in Vivekananda's case there was the additional fascination of profoundity of soul, the desire for pure contemplation, the bent of the inner being towards constant flights, against which the necessity for action had always to struggle. Dayananda did not know this tragic division of soul. Nevertheless he was all that was required for the task he had to accomplish.

to the highest grade of Brahmins,[1] no less versed in Vedic learning than in mundane affairs, both political and commercial. His father took part in the government of the little native state. He was rigidly orthodox according to the letter of the law with a stern domineering character, and this last to his sorrow he passed on to his son.

As a child Dayananda was therefore brought up under the strictest Brahmin rule, and at the age of eight was invested with the sacred thread and all the severe moral obligations entailed by this privilege rigorously enforced by his family.[2] It seemed as if he was to become a pillar of orthodoxy in his turn, but instead he became the Samson, who pulled down the pillars of the temple ;—a striking example among a hundred others of the vanity of human effort, when it imagines that it is possible by a superimposed education to fashion the mind of the rising generation and so dispose of the future. The most certain result is revolt.

That of Dayananda is worth recording. When he was fourteen his father took him to the temple to celebrate the great festival of Shiva. He had to pass the night after a strict fast in pious vigil and prayer. The rest of the faithful went to sleep. The young boy alone resisted its spell. Suddenly he saw a mouse nibbling the offerings to the God and running over Shiva's body. It was enough. There is no doubt about moral revolt in the heart of a child. In a second his faith in the idol was

[1] Samavedi, the highest order of Brahmins in the Veda.

[2] The vows of Brahmacharya, chastity, purity, poverty throughout student life, and the obligation to recite the Vedas daily, and to live according to a whole system of regular and very strict rites.

shattered for the rest of his life. He left the temple, went home alone through the night, and thenceforward refused to participate in the religious rites.[1]

It marked the beginning of a terrible struggle between father and son. Both were of an unbending and autocratic will, which barred the door to any mutual concession. At nineteen Dayananda ran away from home to escape from a forced marriage. He was caught and imprisoned. He fled again, this time for ever (1845). He never saw his father again.

For fifteen years this son of a rich Brahmin, despoiled of everything and subsisting on alms, wandered as a Sadhu clad in the saffron robe along the roads of India. This again seems like a first edition of Vivekananda's life and his pilgrimage as a young man over the length and breadth of Hindustan. Like him Dayananda went in search of learned men, ascetics, studying here philosophy, there the Vedas, learning the theory and practice of Yoga. Like him he visited almost all the holy places of India and took part in religious debates. Like him he suffered, he braved fatigue, insult and danger, and this contact with the body of his fatherland lasted four times longer than Vivekananda's experience. In contradistinction to the latter, however, Dayananda remained far from the human masses through which he passed, for the simple reason that he spoke nothing but Sanskrit throughout this period. He was indeed what Vivekananda would have been, if he had not

[1] At the present time this night is kept as a festival by the Arya Samaj.

encountered Ramakrishna, and if his high aristocratic and Puritan pride had not been curbed by the indulgent kindness and rare spirit of comprehension of this most human of Gurus. Dayananda did not see, did not wish to see, anything round him but superstition and ignorance, spiritual laxity, degrading prejudices and the millions of idols he abominated. At length about 1860 he found at Mathura an old Guru even more implacable than himself in his condemnation of all weakness and his hatred of superstition, a Sannyasin blind from infancy and from the age of eleven quite alone in the world, a learned man, a terrible man, Swami Virjananda Sarasvaty. Dayananda put himself under his "discipline,"[1] which in its old literal seventeenth century sense scarred his flesh as well as his spirit. Dayananda served this untamable and indomitable man for two and a half years as his pupil. It is therefore mere justice to remember that his subsequent course of action was simply the fulfilment of the will of the stern blind man, whose surname he adopted, casting his own to oblivion. When they separated Virjananda extracted from him to promise that he would consecrate his life to the annihilation of the heresies that had crept into the Puranic faith, to re-establish the ancient religious methods of the age before Buddha, and to disseminate the truth.

Dayananda immediately began to preach in Northern India, but unlike the benign men of God who open all heaven before the eyes of their hearers,

[1] Discipline in the ecclesiastical language of an earlier age meant not only supervision, but the instrument used by ascetics to scourge themselves.

he was a hero of the *Iliad* or of the *Gita* with the athletic strength of a Hercules,[1] who thundered against all forms of thought other than his own, the only true one. He was so successful that in five years Northern India was completely changed. During these five years his life was attempted four or five times—sometimes by poison. Once a fanatic threw a cobra at his face in the name of Shiva, but he caught it and crushed it. It was impossible to get the better of him ; for he possessed an unrivalled knowledge of Sanskrit and the Vedas, while the burning vehemence of his words brought his adversaries to naught. They likened him to a flood. Never since Sankara had such a prophet of Vedism appeared. The orthodox Brahmins, completely overwhelmed, appealed from him to Benares, their Rome. Dayananda went there fearlessly, and undertook in November, 1869, a Homeric contest. Before millions of assailants, all eager to bring him to his knees, he argued for hours together alone aganist three hundred pandits—the whole front line and the reserve of Hindu orthodoxy.[2] He proved that the Vedanta as practised was diametrically opposed to the primitive Vedas. He claimed that he was going back to the true Word, the pure Law of two thousand years earlier. They had not the patience to hear him out. He was hooted down and excommunicated. A void was created round him, but the echo of such a combat in the style of the *Mahabharata* spread throughout

[1] His exploits have become legendary. He stopped with one hand a carriage with two runaway horses. He tore the naked sword out of an adversary's hand and broke it in two, etc. His thunderous voice could make itself heard above any tumult.

[2] A Christian missionary present at this tournament has left

the country, so that his name became famous over the whole of India.

At Calcutta, where he stayed from December 15, 1872 to April 15, 1873, Ramakrishna met him. He was also cordially received by the Brahmo Samaj. Keshab and his people voluntarily shut their eyes to the differences existing between them ; they saw in him a rough ally in their crusade against orthodox prejudices and the millions of gods. But Dayananda was not a man to come to an understanding with religious philosophers imbued with Western ideas. His national Indian theism, its steel faith forged from the pure metal of the Vedas alone, had nothing in common with theirs, tinged as it was with modern doubt, which denied the infallibility of the Vedas and the doctrine of transmigration.[1] He broke with them the richer for the encounter,[2] for he owed them[3] the very simple

an excellent and impartial account of it, reproduced by Lajpat Rai in his book. (*Christian Intelligence,* Calcutta, March, 1870).

[1] These two, according to Lajpat Rai, himself affiliated to the Arya Samaj, are "the two cardinal principles which distinguish the Arya Samaj from the Brahmo Samaj."

It must be remembered that twenty years before Dayananda, (1844-46), Devendranath had also been tempted by the faith in the infallibility of the Vedas, but that he had renounced it in favour of direct and personal union with God. He was, it is said, of all the chiefs of the Brahmo Samaj the one nearest to Dayananda. But agreement was impossible. Devendranath, whose ideal was peace and harmony, could have no real sympathy with this perpetual warrior, armed with hard dogmatism and applying methods of pure scholasticism to the most modern social conflicts.

[2] In 1877 a last attempt was made to find a basis of agreement between the religious leaders and their divergent doctrines. Keshab and Dayananda met again, but agreement was impossible, since Dayananda would yield nothing.

[3] To Babu Keshab Chunder Sen.

suggestion, whose practical value had not struck him before, that his propaganda would be of little effect unless it was delivered in the language of the people. He went to Bombay, where shortly afterwards his sect, following the example of the Brahmo Samaj, but with a better genius of organisation, proceeded to take root in the social life of India. On April 10, 1875, he founded at Bombay his first Arya Samaj, or Association of the Aryans of India, the pure Indians, the descendants of the old conquering race of the Indus and the Ganges. And it was exactly in those districts that it took root most strongly. From 1877, the year when its principles were definitely laid down at Lahore, to 1883, Dayananda spread a close network over Northern India, Rajputana, Gujarat, the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, and above all in the Punjab, which remained his chosen land. Practically the whole of India was affected. The only Province where his influence failed to make itself felt was Madras.[1]

He fell, struck down in his prime, by an assassin. The concubine of a Maharajah, whom the stern prophet had denounced, poisoned him. He died at Ajmere on October 30, 1883.

But his work pursued its uninterrupted and triumphant course. From 40,000 in 1891 the number of its members rose to 100,000 in 1901, to 243,000 in 1911, and to 468,000 in 1921.[2] Some of the most important Hindu personalities, politicians and

[1] This is all the more striking since it was in Madras that Vivekananda found his most ardent and best organised disciples.

[2] Of whom 223,000 are in the Punjab and Delhi, 205,000

Maharajahs, belonged to it. Its spontaneous and impassioned success in contrast to the slight reverberations of Keshab's Brahmo Samaj, shows the degree to which Dayananda's stern teachings corresponded to the thought of his country and to the first stirrings of Indian nationalism, to which he contributed.

It may perhaps be useful to remind Europe of the reasons at the bottom of this national awakening, now in full flood.

Westernisation was going too far, and was not always revealed by its best side. Intellectually it had become rather a frivolous attitude of mind, which did away with the need for independence of thought, and transplanted young intelligences from their proper environment, teaching them to despise the genius of their race. The instinct for self-preservation revolted. Dayananda's generation had watched, as he had done, not without anxiety, suffering, and irritation, the gradual infiltration into the veins of India of superficial European rationalism on the one hand, whose ironic arrogance understood nothing of the depths of the Indian spirit, and on the other hand, of a Christianity, which when it entered family life fulfilled only too well Christ's prophecy that "he had come to bring division between father and son. . . ."

It is certainly not for us to depreciate Christian influences. I am a Catholic by birth, and as such have known the taste of Christ's blood and enjoyed the storehouse of profound life, revealed in the

in the United Provinces, 23,000 in Kashmir, 4,500 in Behar. In short it is the expression of Northern India and one of its most energetic elements.

books and in the lives of great Christians, although I am outside all exclusive forms of church and religion. Hence I do not dream of subordinating such a faith to any other faith whatsoever ; when the soul had reached a certain pitch—*acumen mentis*[1]—it can go no further. Unfortunately the religion of one country does not always work upon alien races through its best elements. Too often questions of human pride are intermingled with the desire for earthly conquest, and, provided victory is attained, the view is too often held that the end justifies the means. I will go further and say that, even in its highest presentation, it is very rare that one religion takes possession of the spirit of another race in its deepest essence at the final pitch of the soul, of which I have just spoken. It does so rather by aspects, very significant no doubt, but secondary in importance. Those of us, who have pored over the wonderful system of Christian metaphysics and sounded their depths, know what infinite spaces they offer to the soaring wings of the spirit, and that the Divine Cosmos they present of the Being and the Love cleaving to Him, is no whit less vast or less sublime than the conception of the Vedantic Infinite. But if a Keshab caught a glimpse of this, a Keshab was an exception among his people, and it would seem that Christianity is very rarely manifested to Hindus under this aspect. It is presented to them rather as a code of ethics, of practical action, as love in action, if such a term is permissible, and though this is a very important

[1] To use the phrase of Richard de Saint-Victor and Western mystics to Fracois de Sales. (*Cf.* Henri Bremond : *The Metaphysics of the Saints*).

aspect, it is not the greatest.[1] It is a remarkable fact that the most notable conversions have taken place in the ranks of active and energetic personalities rather than in those of deep spiritual contemplation, of men capable of heroic flights of soul.[2]

Whether this is true or not, and it provides an ample theme for discussion, it is a historic fact that when Dayananda's mind was in process of being formed, the highest religious spirit of India had been so weakened that the religious spirit of Europe threatened to extinguish its feeble flame without the satisfaction of substituting its own. The Brahmo Samaj was troubled by it, but was itself willy nilly stamped with Western Christianity. Ram Mohun Roy's starting point had been Protestant unitarianism. Devendranath, although he denied it, had not the strength to prevent its intrusion into the Samaj, when he yielded the ascendancy to Keshab, already three parts given over to it. As early as 1880 one of Keshab's critics[3] could say that "those who believe in him have lost the name of theists,

[1] I myself independently and intuitively belong to the side of Salesian Theocentrism, as represented by M. Henri Bremond in a recent polemic against the religious moralism or anti-mysticism of M. l'Abbe Vincent. (*Cf. op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 26-47).

[2] The Sadhu Sundar Singh, whose name is well-known in Europe among Protestants, is a good example. A Punjab Sikh, the son of a Sirdar and brother of a commander in the army, this intrepid man delighted in seeking and braving martyrdom in Thibet, where he found traces of other Christian martyrs belonging to the two warlike races, the Sikhs and the Afghans. (*Cf.* Max Schaerer: *Sadhu Sundar Singh*, 1922, Zurich). To judge of him from this pamphlet, it would appear that in speaking of the other religions of India, he had never penetrated to the core of their thought.

[3] *Cf.* Frank Lillington: *The Brahmo and the Arya in their relation to Christianity*, 1901.

because they lean more and more towards Christianity." However precisely the position of the third Brahmo Samaj (the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj detached from Keshab) had been defined as against Indian Christianity, Indian public opinion could feel no confidence in a church undermined by two successive schisms within the space of half a century, and threatened, as we have seen, during the next half century with complete absorption in Christianity.

The enthusiastic reception accorded to the thunderous champion of the Vedas, a Vedist belonging to a great race and penetrated with the sacred writings of ancient India and with her heroic spirit, is then easily explained. He alone hurled the defiance of India against her invaders. Dayananda declared war on Christianity and his heavy massive sword cleft it asunder with scant reference to the scope or exactitude of his blows. He put it to the test of a vengeful, unjust and injurious criticism, which fastened upon each separate verse of the Bible and was blind and deaf to its real, its religious and even its literal meaning (for he read the Bible in a Hindi translation and in a hurry!). His slashing commentaries,[1] reminiscent of Voltaire and his *Dictionnaire Philosophique,* have unfortunately remained the arsenal for the spiteful anti-Christianity of certain modern Hindus.[2]

[1] Contained in his great work, written in Hindi, *Satyartha Prakash* (The Torch of Truth).

[2] Notably the neo-Buddhists, for difficult though it is to believe, the beautiful name of Buddha, originally symbolising the spirit of detachment and universal peace, is well on the way in these days to become the standard of an aggressive propaganda having scant respect for other beliefs.

Nevertheless, as Glasenapp rightly remarks, they are of paramount interest for European Christianity, which ought to know what is the image of itself as presented by its Asiatic adversaries.

Dayananda had no greater regard for the Koran and the Puranas, and trampled under foot the body of Brahmin orthodoxy. He had no pity for any of his fellow countrymen, past or present, who had contributed in any way to the thousand-year decadence of India, at one time the mistress of the world.[1] He was a ruthless critic of all who, according to him, had falsified or profaned the true Vedic religion.[2] He was a Luther fighting against his own misled and misguided Church of Rome ;[3]

[1] His panorama of Indian History is an interesting one, a kind of impassioned *Discourse on Universal History,* to allude to a celebrated work of Bossuet of the seventeenth century. It traces the origin of humanity and the domination of India over the entire globe (including America and the Oceanic Islands ; for according to him, the Nagas—serpents—and the infernal spirits of the legends are the people of the Antipodes ; just so the struggles with the Asuras and Rakshasas mean the wars with the Assyrians and the Negroids). Dayananda replaces the whole of mythology upon the earth. He dates all the misfortunes of India and the ruin of the great spirit of the Vedas to the wars of ten times a Hundred Years, sung by the *Mahabharata,* wherein heroic India destroyed herself . . . . . He is filled with hatred, not only against the materialism which resulted, but against Jainism, the suborner. For him Sankara was the glorious though unfortunate hero of the first war of Hindu independence in the realm of the soul. He wished to break the bonds of heresy, but he failed. He died in the midst of his campaigns for freedom, but he himself remained caught by Jainistic decoys, particularly by Maya, which inspired in Dayananda—no dreamer of dreams but a man firmly implanted in the soil of reality—an invincible repugnance.

[2] He called all idolatry a sin, and considered that Divine Incarnations were absurd and sacrilegious.

[3] He scourged the Brahmins with the name of "popes."

and his first care was to throw open the wells of the holy books, so that for the first time his people could come to them and drink for themselves. He translated and wrote commentaries on the Vedas in the vernacular[1]—it was in truth an epoch-making date for India when a Brahmin not only acknowledged that all human beings have the right to know the Vedas, whose study had been previously prohibited by orthodox Brahmins, but insisted that their study and propaganda was the duty of every Arya.[2]

[1] Between 1876 and 1883 he directed a whole train of pandits. He wrote in Sanskrit and the pandits translated into the dialects. He alone, however, translated the original text. His translation, which he had no time to revise, is always preceded by a grammatical and etymological analysis of each verse, followed by a commentary explaining the general sense.

[2] Article III of the Ten Principles of Lahore (1877) : "The Vedas are the book of true knowledge. The first duty of every Arya is to learn them and to teach them."

By a strange accident Dayananda concluded a political alliance lasting several years (1879-81) with a Western community, destined for a great work, the Theosophical Society, on the basis of his vindication of the Vedas against the rising flood of Christianity. The Theosophical Society was founded in 1875 in the South of India by a Russian, Mme. Blavatsky, and an American, Colonel Olcott, and had the great merit of stimulating the Hindus to study their sacred texts, especially the *Gita* and the *Upanishads,* six volumes of which Colonel Olcott published in Sanskrit. It also headed the movement for the establishment of Indian schools, especially in Ceylon, and even dared to open schools for "untouchables." It therefore contributed to the national religious, and social awakening of India ; and Dayananda seemed about to make common cause with it. But when the Society took him at his word and offered him its regular co-operation, he refused its offer, thereby taking away from the Theosophical Society all chance of spiritual dominion over India. It has since played a secondary part, but has been useful from the social point of view, if the establishment in 1899 of the Central Hindu College at Benares is to be

It is true that his translation was an interpretation, and that there is much to criticise with regard to accuracy[1] as well as with regard to the rigidity of the dogmas and principles he drew from the text, the absolute infallibility claimed for the one book, which according to him had emanated direct from the "pre-human" or superhuman Divinity, his denials from which there was no appeal, his implacable condemnations, his theism of action, his credo of battle,[2] and finally his national God.[3]

But in default of outpourings of the heart and

attributed to the influence of Mrs. Besant. The Anglo-American element, preponderant in its strange mixture of East and West, has twisted in a curious way the vast and liberal system of Hindu metaphysics by its spirit of noble but limited pragmatism. Further it must be added that it has given itself a kind of pontifical and infallible authority, allowing of no appeal, which though veiled is none the less implacable, and has appeared in this light to independent minds such as that of Vivekananda, who, as we shall see, on his return from America categorically denounced it.

On the subject there is an article by G. E. Monod Herzen, written in its favour: "An Indo-European Influence, the Theosophical Society," (*Feuilles de l'Inde,* No. 1, Paris, 1928), and a brilliant, comprehensive, and malicious chapter by Count H. Keyserling in his *Travel Diary of a Philosopher,* 1918.

[1] But not his passionate loyalty, which remains proof against all attack.

[2] Among rules to be followed as set down at the end of his *Satyartha Prakash,* Dayananda orders: "Seek to combat, to humiliate, to destroy the wicked, even the rulers of the world, the men in power. Seek constantly to sap the power of the unjust and to strengthen that of the just, even at the cost of terrible sufferings, of death itself, which no man should seek to avoid."

[3] "The Samaj will glorify, pray to and unite with the one and only God, as shown by the Vedas. . . . The conception of God and the objects of the Universe is founded solely on

the calm sun of the spirit, bathing the nations of men and their Gods in its effulgence,—in default of the warm poetry radiating from the entire being of a Ramakrishna or the grandiose poetic style of a Vivekananda, Dayananda transfused into the languid body of India his own formidable energy, his certainty, his lion's blood. His words rang with heroic power. He reminded the secular passivity of a people, too prone to bow to fate, that the soul is free and that action is the generator of

the teachings of the Vedas and the other true Shastras," which he enumerates.

It is, however, curious (so strong was the current of the age setting at all cost towards unity) that Dayananda's nationalism like the unitarianism of Roy and Keshab had universal pretensions :

"The well-being of humanity as a whole ought to be the objective of the Samaj." (Principles of the Arya Samaj of 1875).

"The primary object of the Samaj is to do good to the whole world by bettering the physical, spiritual and social condition of humanity." (Principles of the Arya Samaj of Lahore, revised in 1877).

"I believe in a religion based on universal principles and embracing all that has been accepted as truth by humanity and that will continue to be obeyed in the ages to come. This is what I call religion : Eternal Primitive Religion (for it is above the hostility of human beliefs). . . . That alone which is worthy to be believed by all men and in all ages, I hold as acceptable." (*Satyartha Prakash*).

Like all impassioned believers, but in perfect good faith he confounds the conception of the eternal and universal "Truth", which he claimed to serve, with that of the faith he decreed. He was careful to submit the criterion of truth to five preliminary tests, the first two in conformity with the teachings of the Vedas and to the definitions he had laid down concerning the nature of God and His attributes. How could he doubt his right to impose the Vedas upon humanity as a whole, when he started by decreeing that they contained, as Aurobindo Ghose says, "a plenary revelation of religious, ethical and scientific truth. Its religious teaching is monotheistic

destiny.[1] He set the example of a complete clearance of all the encumbering growth of privilege and prejudice by a series of hatchet blows. If his metaphysics were dry and obscure,[2] if his theology was narrow and in my opinion retrograde, his social activities and practices were of intrepid boldness. With regard to questions of fact he went further than the Brahmo Samaj, and even further than the Ramakrishna Mission ventures to-day.

His creation, the Arya Samaj, postulates in

and the Vedic gods are different descriptive names of the one Deity; they are at the same time indications of His powers as we see them working in Nature, and by a true understanding of the sense of the Vedas we could arrive at all the scientific truths which have been discovered by modern research." ("The Secret of the Veda," *Arya,* November, 1914, Pondicherry).

Dayananda's national exegesis of Vedism let loose a flood of pamphlets, whose object was to restore and reawaken the philosophies, cults, rites and practices of ancient India. There was a passionate reaction of antique ideals against the ideas of the West. (*Cf. Prabuddha Bharata,* November, 1928.)

[1] "An energetic and active life is preferable to the acceptance of the decrees of destiny. Destiny is the outcome of deeds. Deeds are the creators of destiny. Virtuous activity is superior to passive resignation. . . ."

"The soul is a free agent, free to act as it pleases. But it depends on the grace of God for the enjoyment of the fruit of its actions." (*Satyartha Prakash*).

[2] Dayananda distinguishes, it seems, three eternal substances—God, the Soul and Prakriti, the material cause of the universe. God and the Soul are two distinct entities: they have attributes which are not interchangeable and each accomplishes certain functions. They are, however, inseparable. The Creation, the essential exercise of Divine Energy, is accomplished over primordial elements, which it combines and orders. The terrestrial bondage of the soul is caused by ignorance. Salvation is emancipation from error and the attainment of the freedom of God. But it is only for a time; at the end of which the soul retakes another body . . . etc.

principle equal justice for all men and all nations, together with equality of the sexes. It repudiates a hereditary caste system, and only recognises professions or guilds, suitable to the complementary aptitudes of men in society ; religion was to have no part in these divisions, but only the service of the state, which assesses the tasks to be performed. The state alone, if it considers it for the good of the community, can raise or degrade a man from one caste to another by way of reward or punishment. Dayananda wished every man to have the opportunity to acquire as much knowledge as would enable him to raise himself in the social scale as high as he was able. Above all he would not tolerate the abominable injustice of the existence of untouchables, and nobody has been a more ardent champion of their outraged rights. They were admitted to the Arya Samaj on a basis of equality ; for the Aryas are not a caste. "The Aryas are all men of superior principles ; and the Dasyus are they who lead a life of wickedness and sin."

Dayananda was no less generous and no less bold in his crusade to improve the condition of women, a deplorable one in India. He revolted against the abuses from which they suffered, recalling that in the heroic age they occupied in the home and in society a position at least equal to men. They ought to have equal education, according to him, and supreme control in marriage[1] over household matters including the finances. Dayananda in fact claimed equal rights in marriage for men and

[1] In marriage the minimum age was to be sixteen for girls and twenty-five for boys. Dayananda was resolutely opposed to infant marriage.

women, and though he regarded marriage as indissoluble, he admitted the remarriage of widows, and went so far as to envisage a temporary union for women as well as for men for the purpose of having children, if none had resulted from marriage.

Lastly the Arya Samaj, whose eighth principle was "to diffuse knowledge and dissipate ignorance," has played a great part in the education of India. Especially in the Punjab and the United Provinces it has founded a host of schools for girls and boys. Their laborious hives are grouped round two model establishments :[1] the Dayananda Anglo-Vedic College of Lahore and the Gurukula of Kangri, national bulwarks of Hindu education, which seek to resuscitate the energies of the race and to use at the same time the intellectual and technical conquests of the West.

To these let us add philanthropic activities, such as orphanages, workshops for boys and girls, homes for widows, and great works of social service at the time of public calamities, epidemics, famine, etc.,

[1] This was our information ten years ago at the date of the publication of Lajpat Rai's book. From that date the educational movement has probably continued to expand.

The Dayananda Anglo-Vedic College of Lahore, opened in 1886, combines instruction in Sanskrit, Hindi, Persian, English, Oriental and European Philosophy, History, Political Economy, Science, arts and crafts. The Gurukula is a school founded in 1902, where the children take the vow of poverty, chastity and obedience for sixteen years. Its object is to reform Aryan character by Hindu philosophic and literary culture, vivified by moral energy. There is also a great college for girls in the Punjab, where feminine subjects and domestic economy are united to intellectual studies and the knowledge of three languages, Sanskrit, Hindi and English.

and it is obvious that the Arya Samaj is the rival of the future Ramakrishna Mission.[1]

I have said enough about this rough Sannyasin with the soul of a leader, to show how great an uplifter of the peoples he was—in fact the most vigorous force of the immediate and present action in India at the moment of the rebirth and reawakening of the national consciousness. His Arya Samaj, whether he wished it or no,[2] prepared the way in 1905 for the revolt of Bengal. He was one of the most ardent prophets of reconstruction and of national organisation. I feel that it was he who kept the Vigil ; but his strength was also his weakness. His purpose in life was action and its object his nation. For a people lacking the vision of wider horizons the accomplishment of the action and the creation of the nation might perhaps be enough. But not for India—before her will still lie the universe.

[1] It would appear that in this respect Vivekananda and his disciples have outstripped him. The first activities of social service noted by Lajpat Rai as undertaken by the Arya Samaj, were help in the famine of 1897-98. From 1894 onwards one of Vivekananda's monks, Akhandananda, devoted himself to works of social service. In 1897 part of the Ramakrishna Mission was mobilised against famine and malaria, and the following year against plague.

[2] He forbade it in public ; he always claimed to be non-political and non-anti-British. But the British Government judged differently. The Arya Samaj found itself compromised by the activity of its members.

VII

RAMAKRISHNA AND THE GREAT SHEPHERDS OF INDIA

Such then were the great shepherds of the people, the king-pastors of India, at the moment when the star of Ramakrishna appeared in cloudless glory above the mountains.[1]

Naturally he could not have known the first of these four men, the forerunner, Ram Mohun Roy,

[1] I have only mentioned the greatest. There were many others. India has never lacked messengers of God, founders of sects or religions, and they were continually appearing throughout the period. In the recent treatise by Helmuth von Glasenapp: *Religiose Reformbewegungen im heutigen Indien,* (1928, Leipzig, J. C. Hinrich, Morgenland collection), there is an account of the two most curious: The Atheistic Church of the Supreme, the Dev-Samaj, and the Mystical Church of the Divine Sound (or Word), the Radhasvami-Satsang.* They are not included here because they belong to rather a later date. The Dev-Samaj, though founded in 1887 by Shiva Narayana Agnihotra, only adopted the name "Superhuman" atheism after 1894; and its violent struggle against God, fought in the name of reason, morality and science, by a "Superman," the Dev-Guru (the founder in person), whose initial step was to make himself the object of worship, is to-day in full swing. As for the Radhasvami-Satsang, founded by a trinity of successive, but indistinguishable holy Gurus, whose deaths occurred in 1878, 1898 and 1907 respectively, it is only since the end of the last century that their doctrine has become firmly established. We need not therefore take it into consideration in this account. The seat of the Dev-Samaj is at Lahore, and almost all its adherents are in the Punjab. The two chief centres of the Radhasvami-Satsang are Allahabad and Agra. Hence it is to be noted that both belong to Northern India. Glasenapp says nothing of the appearance of new religions in Southern India, but they were no less

but he knew the other three personally. He first visited them, urged by that overwhelming thirst for God, which made him always ask himself: "Are there no more of His wells, which these have found and from which I have not drunk?" But his practised eye judged them at sight. His critical faculties were never abrogated. As he leant over them to taste them with thirsty devotion, he often laughed mischievously, and rose with the words that his own were better. He was not the man to be dazzled by outward show, glory or eloquence. His veiled eyes did not blink unless the light he sought, the face of God Himself, shone from the depths. They could penetrate through the walls of the body as through a window-pane and searched the very heart with eager curiosity. But what they found there sometimes provoked a sudden quiet outburst of hilarity, untinged with malice, from this indiscreet visitor.

numerous. Such was the religion of the great Guru, Sri Narayana, whose beneficent spiritual activity was exercised for more than forty years in the State of Travancore over some million faithful souls (he has just died in 1928). His doctrine was impregnated with the monist metaphysics of Sankara, but tended to practical action showing very marked differences from Bengal mysticism, whose Bhakti effusions filled him with mistrust. He preached, if one may say so, a Jnana of action, a great intellectual religion, having a very lively sense of the people and their social needs. It has greatly contributed to the uplifting of the oppressed classes in Southern India and its activities have in a measure been allied to those of Gandhi. (*Cf.* Articles by his disciple, P. Natarajan, In *The Sufi Quarterly,* Geneva, December, 1928 and the following months).

* The question is of the mysterious word which stands for the Almighty Being (and which is no longer the famous Vedic *OM* relegated to an inferior place)—the Divine Sound that vibrates through the Universe—the spoken harmony, whence is derived the "Music of the Spheres" (to quote the old

The story of his visit to the imposing Devendranath Tagore as told by himself, is a titbit of comedy, wherein the critical humour and the disrespectful respect of the "little brother" towards the great pontiff, the "King Janaka," have free play.

"Is it possible," a questioner asked him one day,[1] "to reconcile the world and God? What do you think of Maharshi Devendranath Tagore?"

Ramakrishna repeated softly: "Devendranath Tagore . . . . Devendranath . . . . Devendra. . . ."—and he bowed several times. Then he said:

"Do you know what he is? Once upon a time there was a man, whose custom it was to celebrate the feast of Durga Puja with great pomp. Goats were sacrificed from morning till night. After some years the sacrifice lost its brilliancy. Somebody asked the man why it was so greatly reduced, and the man replied: 'I have lost my teeth now.'"

"And so," continued the irreverent story-teller, "it is quite natural that Devendranath should practise meditation at his advanced age."[2]

language of Greco-Roman antiquity). It is to be found under rather a different form in the mysticism of the *Maitrayani Upanishad.*

[1] Keshab Chunder Sen. The conversation is reported by an eye-witness, A. Kumar Dutt. (*Life of Sri Ramakrishna*).

[2] It must be admitted that Ramakrishna's irony did Devendranath a grave injustice. It did not take into account, probably through ignorance, the absolute disinterestedness of the Maharshi and his years of noble and difficult sacrifice. In this I see the attitude of a man of the people to a great aristocrat.

Another account, given by Sashi Bhusan Ghosh in his Memoirs written in Bengali (pp. 245-7), lessens the irony without diminishing the penetration of Ramakrishna, so that justice is better done to the royal idealist.

He paused . . . . "But," he added, bowing once more, "he is undoubtedly a very illustrious man. . . ."

Then he recounted his visit :[1]

"At first when I saw him, I thought him rather proud. Oh ! it was natural ! He was overwhelmed by so many good things : nobility, prestige, riches. . . . . Suddenly I found myself in the state when I can see through a man. Then I consider the greatest, the richest, the most learned men as straw, if I do not see God. . . . And a laugh escaped me . . . . for I discovered that this man at the same time enjoyed the world and led a religious life. He had many children, all young. So in spite of his being a great Jnanin, he had to reconcile himself to the world. I said to him : 'You are the King Janaka of our day. He belonged to the world and

Ramakrishna said that he was introduced to Devendranath with the words : "Here is a madman of God ! " "Devendranath seemed to me to be concentrated upon his own ego, but why should he not have been so concentrated, when he enjoyed so much knowledge, renown, riches and unanimous respect ? But I discovered that Yoga and Bhoga (material enjoyment) ran side by side in his life. . . I said to him : 'You are a true Janaka in this age of sin. Janaka was wont to see both sides at once. So you have kept your soul for God, while your body moves in the material world. That is why I have come to see you. Tell me something about God ! '. . ."

[1] Rabindranath Tagore was then four years old. Ramakrishna was introduced by his patron, Mathur Babu, who had been a fellow student of Devendranath. A curious detail of the visit may interest our European psycho-physiologists. Hardly were the introductions over than Ramakrishna asked Devendranath to undress and show him his chest. Devendranath complied without showing much astonishment. The colour of the skin was scarlet, and Ramakrishna examined it. This persistent redness of the breast is a peculiar sign of the practice of certain Yoga. Ramakrishna never omitted to examine the breast of his disciples, their breathing capacity,

yet he attained the highest realisations. You are in the world, but your mind rests on the heights of God. Tell me something of Him!'"

Devendranath recited to him some beautiful passages from the Veda,[1] and the interview proceeded on a tone of familiar courtesy. Devendranath was much struck by the fire in the eyes of his visitor, and he invited Ramakrishna to a feast for the next day. But he begged him to "cover his body a little," if he wished to be present: for the little pilgrim had not put himself to the trouble of dressing up. Ramakrishna replied with wicked good fellowship that he could not be depended upon; he was as he was, and would come as he was. So they parted very good friends. But early the next morning a very polite note came from the great aristocrat, begging him not to put himself to any trouble. And that was the end. With one caressing stroke of the paw aristocracy remained aloof, secure in its paradise of idealism.

Dayananda was summed up, judged and condemned as of less worth still. It must be admitted that when the two men met at the end of 1873, the Arya Samaj had not yet been founded and the reformer was still in the midst of his career. When

and the soundness of their circulation before allowing or forbidding them to undertake exercises of great concentration.

[1] "This universe is to be likened to a candelabra. And each one of us is a bulb. If we do not burn, the whole candelabra becomes dark. God has created man to celebrate His glory. . . ."

In Sashi's account Ramakrishna made this naive reflection:

"It is strange! While I was meditating in the Panchavati (the grove of Dakshineswar), I also saw an image like a candelabra. . . . Devendranath must really be a very profound man!"

Ramakrishna examined him,[1] he found in him "a little power," by which he meant, "real contact with the Divine." But the tortured and torturing character, the bellicose athleticism of the champion of the Vedas, his feverish insistence that he alone was in the right, and therefore had the right to impose his will, were all blots on his mission in Ramakrishna's eyes. He saw him day and night disputing concerning the Scriptures, twisting their meaning, and striving at all costs to found a new sect. But such preoccupation with personal and worldly success sullied the true love of God, and so he turned away from Dayananda.

His relations with Keshab Chunder Sen were of quite a different order. They were intimate, affectionate and lasting.

Before speaking of them I must express regret that the disciples of the two masters have left us such prejudiced accounts. Each side has been at considerable pains to "vassalise" the other man of God in favour of its own saint. Ramakrishna's

[1] He recognised in him also this characteristic redness of the breast. During one of Ramakrishna's interviews as noted by Mahendra Nath Gupta (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*), on November 28, 1883, a singular statement with regard to Dayananda is attributed to Ramakrishna. He had heard that Dayananda, burning to measure himself against Keshab Chunder Sen on the subject of his Vedic Gods, in whom Keshab did not believe, cried out: "The Lord has done so many things! Can He not also have made the Gods?" This was not in accordance with the views publicly professed by Dayananda, the implacable enemy of polytheism. Was Dayananda's exclamation inexactly reported to Ramakrishna, or did it refer, not to the Gods, but to the Vedic sacrificial fire which Dayananda believed in on the ground of faith in the infallible Vedas? I cannot explain this apparent contradiction

disciples still speak of Keshab with sympathetic regard, and thank him for the homage he yielded to the Paramahamsa. But some of Keshab's disciples cannot forgive Ramakrishna for the ascendancy, real or apparent, he exercised over their master ; hence in order to deny that any such influence could have existed, they have reverted to the plan of raising between them insurmountable barriers of thought ; they scornfully misrepresent Ramakrishna's true worth, and their harmful spite is also directed against the man who preached his Gospel, and made it victorious—Vivekananda.[1]

But having read certain beautiful and fresh pages of Keshab, wherein the ideas and actions of Vivekananda are distinctly foreshadowed, I can well understand that the Brahmos chafe under the silence and oblivion into which the Ramakrishna Mission has allowed them to fall. So far as lies in my power, I shall try to amend this injustice ; for I believe it to be unwitting. But certain Brahmos could not worse uphold Keshab's memory than by confining him within their own narrow limits and by putting in the shade the disinterested affection felt by Keshab for Ramakrishna. In the whole of Keshab's life, so worthy of respect and affection, there is

[1] I have in mind chiefly the pamphlet of B. Mozoomdar : *Professor Max Muller on Ramakrishna ; The World on K. Chunder Sen*, 1900, Calcutta, (*Cf.* Chapter II, "Absurd Inventions and Reports made to Max Muller by the Disciples of Ramakrishna ;" Chapter III, "Differences between the Two Doctrines ;" and above all the insulting Chapter V, "Concerning Vivekananda, the Informant of Max Muller," which does not scruple to join forces with some Anglo-American clergymen, lacerated by the thunderous religious polemics of the great Swami).

nothing more deservedly dear to us than the attitude of respect and affection adopted from the first by this great man at the height of his fame and climax of his thought, and maintained until the end, towards the Little Poor Man of Dakshineswar, then either obscure or misrepresented. The more the Brahmos attempt, their pride hurt by the familiarities of the "madman of God" with the prince of intellectuals, to extract from the writings of Keshab proud denunciations of disordered ecstasy, such as they attribute to Ramakrishna,[1] the more striking is the contrast of Keshab's actual relations to Ramakrishna.

If it is true that Keshab, unlike most of the

[1] *Cf.* B. Mozoomdar, *op. cit.*, Chapter II. In his treatise on Yoga Keshab says: "Knowledge and Bhakti are interchangeable terms. Bhakti is only possible in those who have knowledge, an unknowing Bhakta is an impossibility." But this does not condemn the religious ecstasies of Ramakrishna; for first it would be necessary to prove that a higher form of knowledge was not contained therein. It merely marks the different character of Keshab's contemplations; for him the highest condition consisted in a union of mind with the Eternal, wherein practical intelligence was not obscured in the midst of the manifold occupations of life, society and the home. Keshab's views were in accordance with the spiritual traditions of the Brahmo Samaj. Further, in Chapter III, Mozoomdar quotes Keshab as saying: "Fie a hundred times to the Yogin, if he abandons everything for the love of Yoga! . . . . It is a sin to abandon those whom God has given us to cherish." He claims to find in these words a reference to Ramakrishna as having neglected his duties towards his wife. But it is untrue to say that he neglected them. Not only did he love his wife with a profound and pure love, but he knew how to inspire her with a love, which for her was a source of peace and happiness. I have already shown how seriously he took his responsibility to her, and that he did not allow his disciples to give up duties they had already contracted to old parents, to wife or children dependent upon them in order to follow him

religious men of India, never took a Guru, an intermediary between himself and the Divinity,[1]—so that nobody has the right to say that he was a disciple of Ramakrishna, as is claimed by the Ramakrishnites*—his generous spirit was ever ready to appreciate greatness, and his love of truth was too pure for vanity to have any part in it. Hence this teacher was ever ready to learn,[2] and said of himself: "I am a born disciple . . . . all objects are my masters. I learn from everything."[3] How then can he have failed to learn from the Man of God?

During the early months of 1875 Keshab happened to be with his disciples at a villa near Dakshineswar. Ramakrishna went to visit him[4] with the words:

[1] "From the beginning of my religious life," he wrote, "I have been ever wont to receive instruction from Thee, my God! . . . ."

* See *Note II* at the end of the volume.—*Publisher.*

[2] I have been happy to find the same point of view that I have adopted, in the beautiful book illumined by the faith of Manilal C. Parekh, a Christian disciple of Keshab, (*Brahmarshi Keshab Ch. Sen*, 1926, Oriental Christ House, Rajkot, Bombay). Manilal C. Parekh clearly recognises that Keshab owed much to Ramakrishna, probably more than Ramakrishna owed to him. But, like myself, he sees in it another reason for admiring the largeness of his spirit and his great heart.

[3] But he says also: "God has implanted in me the power to aspire to the good qualities of every man."

[4] He had noticed him as early as 1865, when young Keshab was Devendranath's lieutenant at the head of the Adi Brahmo Samaj. Keshab's face had struck him. It was not the kind that is easily forgotten. Keshab was tall, his face oval, "his complexion clear like that of an Italian" (Mukerji). But if his spirit, like his face, was tinged by the tender sun of the West, the depths of his soul remained Indian. Ramakrishna, watching him as he meditated, was not mistaken. "On the platform of the Brahmo Samaj several people were meditating,"

"I hear you have seen a vision of God, I have come to find out what it is."

Thereupon he began to sing a famous hymn to Kali, and in the midst of it he fell into an ecstasy. Even for Hindus enlightened by reason this was an ordinary sight; and keshab, who, as we have seen, was sufficiently suspicious of such rather morbid manifestations of devotion, would hardly have been struck by it, if, on coming out of Samadhi at the instance of his nephew,[1] Ramakrishna had not forthwith launched into a flood of magnificent words regarding the One and Infinite God. His ironic good sense appeared even in this inspired outpouring, and it struck Keshab very forcibly. He charged his disciples to observe it. After a short time he had no doubt that he was dealing with an exceptional personality, and in his turn went to seek it out. They became friends. He invited Ramakrishna to the ceremonies of his Brahmo Samaj; and used to come to take him from his temple for excursions on the Ganges; and since his generous soul was obliged to share his discoveries with others, he spoke everywhere of Ramakrishna,

he says of his visit in 1865. "In the centre of the group was Keshab lost in contemplation; he was as motionless as a piece of wood. He was then quite a young man; but it was at his bait that the fish was nibbling . . . ." (a familiar metaphor meaning that God was responding to his appeal alone).

[1] For the interest of European science, it is to be noted that the only method of recalling Ramakrishna from his ecstatic trances was to pronounce in his ear such or such a name of the Lord, or some Mantra (form of prayer), differing according to the degree and the form of the ecstasy. The character of psychic concentration was then very marked; and it was impossible to speak of any initial physiological disorder; the spirit always remained in full control.

in his sermons, and in his writings for journals and reviews, both in English and in the native languages. His own fame was put at Ramakrishna's disposal, and it was through Keshab that his reputation, which until then had, with a few near exceptions, not reached the popular religious masses, came to be known in a short time within the intellectual middle class circles of Bengal and beyond.

The modesty shown by the noble Keshab, the illustrious chief of the Brahmo Samaj, rich in learning and prestige, in bowing down before this unknown man, ignorant of book-learning and of Sanskrit, who could hardly read and who wrote with difficulty, is truly admirable. But Ramakrishna's penetration confounded him and he sat at his feet as a disciple.

But this is not to say that Keshab was the disciple of Ramakrishna, as is claimed by some over-zealous followers of the latter. It is not true that any one of his essential ideas was derived from him :* for they were already formed when he met Ramakrishna for the first time. We have seen that after 1862 he began to conceive of the harmony of religions and their original unity. He said in 1863 : "All truths are common to all, for all are of God. Truth is no more European than Asiatic, no more yours than mine." In 1869 in the course of a lecture on the *Future Church,* he visualised all religions as a vast symphony, wherein each one, while keeping its distinctive character, the tone of its instrument,

* See *Note II* at the end of the volume.—*Publisher.*

the register of its voice united to praise God the Father and man the Brother in one universal anthem. On the other hand, it is false to claim that Keshab needed Ramakrishna's help to arrive at his conception of the Mother—a conception common to all ages in India, as that of the Father in the West. Ramakrishna did not create it. The hymns of Ramprasad, stored within his memory, sing Her in all keys. The idea of God's maternity had been incorporated in the Brahmo Samaj during the pontificate of Devendranath. Keshab's disciples have no difficulty in citing invocations to the Mother all through the work of their master.[1]

Undoubtedly the twin ideas of the Divine Mother and the brotherhood of Her worshippers were beautiful ones, whatever the forms of their ritual and means of expression, and, as ideas, they were already possessed by Keshab and revivified by his sincere faith. But it was another thing to find them alive and vital in a Ramakrishna ! The little Poor Man was not troubled by theories ; he simply *was*. He *was* the communion of the Gods with believers ; he *was* the Mother and Her lover ; he saw Her ; She was seen through him ; She could be touched. What a discovery this genius of heart, who communicated

[1] 1862 : when Keshab was still the minister of the Adi Brahmo Samaj of Devendranath, a hymn was sung : "Sitting on the knees of the Mother."

1866 : Manual of the Brahmo Samaj : "O Divine Mother, bind me by Thy mercy. . . . . O Mother, come, draw near ! "

1875 : "Happy am I ! I have been merged in the heart of the Mother, I am now among Her children ; the Mother dances with Her children. . . ."

(But before this last date the meeting of Keshab and Ramakrishna had taken place. *Cf.* B. Mozoomdar, *op. cit.* Chapter III).

to those coming into contact with him the warm breath of the Goddess and the shelter of Her beautiful arms, was to Keshab, and how deeply he must have felt its impact, for he too was a Bhakta, a believer through love !. . . .[1]

"The sweet, simple, charming and childlike nature of Ramakrishna coloured the Yoga of Keshab and his immaculate conception of religion," wrote Chiranjib Sarma, one of his biographers.

And one of the missionaries of Keshab's church, Babu Girish Chunder Sen,[2] wrote :

"It was from Ramakrishna that Keshab received the idea of invoking God by the sweet name of Mother with the simplicity of a child. . . ."[3]

Only the last quotation needs comment ; for we have shown that Keshab did not wait for Ramakrishna before invoking the Mother. Ramakrishna, however, brought him a renewal of love and immediate certitude, the heart of a child.

[1] Promotho Loll Sen says that he communed daily with God. "Let prayer be your chief preoccupation ! Pray ardently and without ceasing, alone and together, let it be the alpha and omega of your life ! "

[2] *The Life and Teachings of the Paramahamsa Ramakrishna,* Article in the *Dharmatattwa.*

[3] Babu Girish Chunder Sen and Ciranjib Sarma, quoted by the Ramakrishnites in support of their thesis, certainly exaggerated the influence of Ramakrishna on Keshab's Brahmo Samaj. Those who try to prove too much lay themselves open to suspicion. To write like Chiranjib Sarma that "The worship of God as Mother was due to Ramakrishna," is a contradiction of the facts. It is quite enough to say that Ramakrishna's example developed it in the Brahmo Samaj. The Brahmo cult was rather hard. "The shadow of Ramakrishna" to use a simile of Babu Girish Ch. Sen, "softened it."

Hence it was not the discovery of the "New Dispensation" that Keshab began to preach in the same year (1875) that his path crossed Ramakrishna's,[1] but rather an irresistible outpouring of faith and joy which made him cry his message to the world.

Ramakrishna was a wonderful stimulant for the Brahmos, a tongue of flame dancing at Pentecost over the heads of the apostles, burning and enlightening them. He was at once their sincere friend and their judge, who spared neither his affection nor his mischievous criticism.

When he first visited the Brahmo Samaj, his penetrating and amused glance had seen through the rather conventional devotion of its excellent members. According to his own humorous account :[2]

"The leader said : 'Let us commune with Him.'

[1] Nevertheless Pratap Chunder Mozoomdar, in his sympathetic Life of Keshab, admits that the meeting with Ramakrishna without altering the essentially theistic character of the New Dispensation, led Keshab to present it in a more conciliatory and easily accessible form.

Ramakrishna "had gathered the essential conceptions of Hindu polytheism into an original structure of eclectic spirituality. . . . This strange eclecticism suggested to Keshab's appreciative mind the thought of broadening the spiritual structure of his own movement. . . . . The Hindu conceptions of the Divine attributes spontaneously recommended themselves as beautiful and true, and also as the surest means of making his faith intelligible and acceptable in the land. Of course he kept the simple universal basis of theism intact." But Mozoomdar adds with regret that such a presentation of theism with a multiplicity of Divine attributes has since been exploited in favour of popular idolatry.

[2] *Cf.* Dhan Gopal Mukerji : *The Face of Silence,* 1926. (Saradananda gives a similar account in his chapter on the Brahmo Samaj and Ramakrishna).

I thought : ' They will now go into the inner world and stay a long time.' Hardly had a few minutes passed when they all opened their eyes. I was astonished. Can anyone find Him after so slight a meditation ? After it was all over, when we were alone, I spoke to Keshab about it : ' I watched all your congregation community with their eyes shut. Do you know what it reminded me of ? Sometimes at Dakshineswar I have seen under the trees a flock of monkeys sitting, stiff and looking the very picture of innocence. . . . They were thinking and planning their campaign of robbing certain gardens of fruits, roots, and other edibles . . . . in a few moments. The communing that your followers did with God to-day is no more serious! ' "

In a ritual hymn of the Brahmo Samaj this verse occurs :

" Think of Him and worship Him at every instant of the day ! "

Ramakrishna stopped the singer, and said :

" You should alter the verse into ' Pray to Him and worship Him only twice a day.' Say what you really do. Why tell fibs to the Infinite ? "

The Brahmo Samaj of Keshab, while it extolled faith, did so in a purposely stilted, abstract and solemn tone, reminiscent of the Anglican. It seemed to be always on guard against any suspicion or idolatry.[1] Ramakrishna took a mischievous

[1] Here is a type of Brahmo prayer, quoted in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* :

" Om ! Thou art our Father. Give us knowledge ! Do not destroy us !

" Om ! Brahman ! Truth ! Knowledge ! Infinite ! He is Bliss and Immortality ! He shines ! He is Peace ! He is the Good ! He is the One ! . . . .

delight in accusing it, not without justice, of mild idolatry. One day he heard Keshab in prayer enumerating all the perfections of the Lord.

"Why do you give these statistics?" he asked him. "Does a son say to his father: 'O my father, you possess so many houses, so many gardens, so many horses, etc.' . . . ? It is natural for a father to put his resources at the disposal of his son. If you think of Him and His gifts as something extraordinary, you can never be intimate with Him, you cannot draw near to him. Do not think of Him as if He were far away from you. Think of Him as your nearest! Then He will reveal Himself to you. . . . Do you not see that if you go into an ecstasy over His attributes, you become an idolator?"[1]

Keshab protested against this attack on a sensitive point; he declared that he hated idolatry, that the God he worshipped was a formless God. Ramakrishna answered quietly:

"God is with form and without form. Images and other symbols are just as valid as your attributes. And these attributes are not different from idolatry, but are merely hard and petrified forms of it."

And again:

"We bow before Thee, O Supreme Being, O Great First Cause! . . . . We bow before Thee, O Light of Knowledge, O Support of all the worlds!

"From the Unreal lead us to the Real! From Darkness lead us to Light! From Death lead us to Immortality! Reach us through and through our self! And evermore protect us, O Thou Terrible, by Thy sweet compassionate face!"

[1] *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 365 and Mukerji.

"You wish to be strict and partial . . . . . For myself I have a burning desire to worship the Lord in as many ways as I can ; nevertheless my heart's desire has never been satisfied. I long to worship with offerings of flowers and fruits, to repeat His holy name in solitude, to meditate upon Him, to sing His hymns, to dance in the joy of the Lord ! . . . Those who believe that God is without form attain Him just as well as those who believe He has form. The only two essentials are faith and self-surrender. . . ."

I can copy the colourless words, but I cannot communicate the real presence, the radiance of person, the tone of voice, the look in the eyes and the captivating smile. Nobody who came in contact with them could resist them. It was above all his living certitude that impressed the on-lookers ; for with him words were not, as with others, a loose and ornamental robe, hiding as much as they claimed to reveal of the unfathomable depths of life ; with him the depths of life blossomed, and God, who for the majority even of religious men is a frame of thought drawing an impenetrable veil across "the Unknown Masterpiece,"[1] was to be seen in him ; for as he spoke he lost himself in God, like a bather who dives and reappears dripping after a moment, bringing with him the smell of seaweed, the taste of the salt of the Ocean. Who can rid himself of its tang ? The scientific spirit of the West can indeed analyse it. But whatever its elements, its synthetic reality was never in doubt. The greatest sceptic can touch the diver as he

[1] Allusion to a celebrated novel of the great French writer, Balzac.

returns from the depths of the Dream, and catch some reflection of submarine flora in his eyes. Keshab and several of his disciples were intoxicated with it.

The strange dialogues of this Indian Plato, delivered on Keshab's yacht as it went up and down the Ganges,[1] deserve to be read. Their narrator, afterwards Ramakrishna's evangelist, was the first to be astonished that such a meeting could have come about between such opposite types of mind. What common ground could there be between the man of God and the man of the world, the great intellectual, the Anglomaniac Keshab, whose reason condemned the Gods? Keshab's disciples pressed round the two sages at the port-hole of the cabin, like a swarm of flies. And as the honey of his words began to flow from Ramakrishna's lips, the flies were drowned in its sweetness.

"It is now more than forty-five years ago that this happened and yet almost everything that the Paramahamsa said is indelibly impressed on my memory. I have never heard any other man speak as he did. . . . As he spoke he would draw a little closer to Keshab until part of his body was unconsciously resting on Keshab's lap, but Keshab sat perfectly still and made no movement to withdraw himself."

Ramakrishna looked with affectionate intensity

[1] Two of them are to be found in an account by M. (Mahendra Nath Gupta), the author of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, dated October 27, 1882. Another witness, Nagendranath Gupta gives an account of another interview in 1881. (*Cf. The Modern Review*, Calcutta, May 1927).

on the faces surrounding him, and described their moral character one by one, as delineated in their features, first the eyes, then the forehead, the nose, the teeth, and the ears; for they formed a language to which he had the key. As he spoke with his sweet and attractive stammer he came to the subject of the Nirakara Brahman, the formless God.

"He repeated the word Nirakara two or three times and then quietly passed into Samadhi as the diver slips into the fathomless deep. . . . . We watched him intently. The whole body relaxed and then became slightly rigid. There was no twitching of the muscles or nerves, no movement of any limb. Both his hands lay in his lap with the fingers lightly interlocked. The sitting posture of the body was easy but absolutely motionless. The face was slightly tilted up and in repose. The eyes were nearly but not wholly closed. The eyeballs were not turned up or otherwise deflected, but they were fixed. . . . The lips were parted in a beatific and indescribable smile, disclosing the gleam of the white teeth. There was something in that wonderful smile which no photograph was ever able to reproduce."[1]

He was recalled to the world by the singing of a hymn . . . .

"He opened his eyes and looked around him as if he were in a strange place. The music stopped. The Paramahamsa looking at us said, 'Who are

[1] Nagendranath Gupta.

In another ecstasy, the one described by M., Ramakrishna spoke to the Mother: "O Mother, they are all fastened inside their bars, they are not free; is it possible to loose them from their prison?"

these people?' And then he vigorously slapped the top of his head several times, and cried out, 'Go down, go down!' . . . . The Paramahamsa became fully conscious and sang in a pleasant voice (a hymn of Kali)."

He sang the identity of the Divine Mother with the Absolute. He sang the joy of the flying kite of the soul, launched by the Mother while She keeps it attached to Her by the string of Illusion.[1]

"The world is the Mother's plaything. It is Her pleasure to let slip from Illusion one or two flying kites among the thousands. It is Her sport. She says to the human soul in confidence with a wink of the eye: 'Go and live in the world until I tell you to do something else! . . . .'"

And in imitation of Her he turned to the disciples of Keshab with an indulgent irony that made him laugh:

"You are in the world. Stay there! It is not for you to abandon it. You are very well as you are, pure gold and alloy, sugar and treacle. . . . We sometimes play a game in which one must gain seventeen points to win. I have passed the limit and I have lost. But you clever people, who have not won enough points, can still continue to play. . . . In truth it matters little if you live

[1] The metaphor of the flying kite is to be found, as we have said, in a hymn of Ramprasad, which Ramakrishna loved to sing: "The Divine Mother and the Liberated Soul." It is also used in a hymn of Nareschandra quoted in the *Gospel*. Nearly all the metaphors, particularly that of the diver to the depths of the Ocean of Life, are used again and again with variations in the poetic and music folk-lore of Bengal from the fifteenth century onwards.

in the family or in the world, so long as you do not lose contact with God."

And it was in the course of these monologues, wherein observation and ecstasy, mocking common sense and highest speculation were so wonderfully blended, that the Paramahamsa produced his beautiful parables, quoted above, of the Divine Tank with several ghats and of Kali, the Spider. He had too keen a sense of reality, he saw too clearly to the very bottom of his listeners, to imagine that he could raise them to the heights of his own liberated soul. He measured their wisdom and their capability, but he asked for the whole of that! Above all he communicated to Keshab and his disciples the spirit of life, the creative breath, coupled with a wide and intellectual tolerance, which recognised the truth in quite diverse points of view, previously considered by them to be irreconcilable He freed their intellectual limbs, petrified within the groove of reason, and made them supple. He tore them from their abstract discussions. "Live, love and create!" And blood again flowed through their veins.

"To create is to be like God," he said to Keshab, who was then spending himself in endless and fruitless polemics. "When you are filled with the essence of all existence then whatever you say becomes true. Poets have praised virtue and truth; has that made their readers virtuous and truthful? When a selfless person lives amongst us his deeds become the very heart-beat of virtue. Whatever he does to others improves even their meanest dreams. Whatever he touches becomes true and pure. He

becomes the father of reality.[1] What he creates never flounders in time This is what I expect you to do. Silence the dogs of invectives! Let the elephant of Being trumpet its blessings on all! You have that power; will you use it? Or, shall you squander this lifetime by abusing people?"[2]

Keshab listened to his advice and took deep root in this warm living earth, bathed in the sap emanating from the Universal Being. Ramakrishna made him feel that no particle of this sap was ever lost, even in the most humble plant of human thought. His mind was sympathetically reopened to all other forms of faith, even to certain outward practices, which he had avoided. He was to be seen invoking by their names Shiva, Shakti, Sarasvati, Lakshmi, Hari, identifying God's attributes with them. For two years he was absorbed in each of the great religious types, the heroic incarnations of the Spirit: Jesus, Buddha, Chaitanya, each representing one side of the Great Mirror. He sought to assimilate them each in turn, so that through their synthesis he might realise the universal ideal. During his last

[1] *Cf. Gandhi*, who is averse to all religious propaganda by word or writing. When he was asked: "How then can we share our experience with others?" he replied: "Our spiritual experiences are necessarily shared and communicated whether we suspect it or not. But by our lives and our examples, not by our words, which are a very inadequate vehicle. Spiritual experiences are deeper than thought itself. By the very fact that we live, spiritual experience will overflow. But if you deliberately set yourself to share your spiritual experience with another, you raise an intellectual barrier between you." (Discussion at the Council of the Federation of International Fellowship, Satyagraha Ashram, Sabarmati, January 15, 1928).

[2] Mukerji.

illness he was especially drawn to that form of Bhakti most familiar to Ramakrishna—a passionate love of the Mother. Keshab's disciples told Ramakrishna, when he came to see him during his last days on earth, that "a great change had taken place." "Often we find him talking to the Divine Mother, waiting for Her and weeping." And Ramakrishna, enraptured by this news, fell into an ecstasy. There is nothing more touching in the whole account of this supreme interview[1] than the appearance of the dying Keshab, shaken by a mortal cough holding on to the walls, supporting himself by the furniture, coming to cast himself at the feet of Ramakrishna. The latter was still half plunged in ecstasy, and was talking to himself. Keshab was silent, drinking in the mysterious words that seemed to come from the Mother Herself. They explained to him with ruthless but consoling tranquillity the deep meaning of his sufferings and his approaching death.[2]

[1] *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, I, section V, chapters I and 2. It was on November 28, 1883 at the close of the day that Ramakrishna entered the house of Keshab with several of his disciples.

[2] Ramakrishna, hardly awakened from ecstasy, looked round at the drawing-room full of beautiful furniture and mirrors. Then he smiled and spoke to himself: "Yes, all these things have had their uses some time ago; but now they serve no purpose. . . . . You are here, Mother. How beautiful You are! . . . ." At this moment Keshab entered and fell at Ramakrishna's feet. "Here I am," he said. Ramakrishna looked at him without seeming to recognise him clearly, and continued his monologue about the Mother and human life. Between the two men not a word was spoken about Keshab's health, although it was the object of the visit. It was not until after some time that Ramakrishna uttered the words I have quoted above.

With what deep insight Ramakrishna understood the hidden confusion of this life of faith and restless love!

"You are ill," he said sweetly. "There is a profound meaning in that. Through your body have passed many deep waves of devotion seeking for the Lord. Your illness bears witness to these emotions. It is impossible to tell what damage they do to the organism at the time they are produced. A boat passes along the Ganges without attracting attention. But some time afterwards a great wave, displaced by its passage, dashes against the bank and washes away part of it. When the fire of the Divine Vision enters the frail house of the body, it first burns the passions, then the false ego, and at last it consumes everything. . . . You have not yet reached the end . . . . Why did you allow your name to be inscribed on the registers of the Lord's hospital? You will never be allowed to come out until the word 'Healed' is written across them."

He then invoked the gracious parable of the Divine gardener digging round the roots of a precious rose tree, so that it might drink the night dew.[1]

"Illness digs round the roots of your being."

[1] "The gardener knows how to treat the common rose, and how to treat the rose of Bassora. He loosens the earth round her roots, so that she may benefit from the night dew. The dew gives strength and freshness to the rose. It is even so with you. The Divine Gardener knows how to treat you. He digs round you right down to the roots, so that His dew may fall upon you, that you may become purer and your work greater and more enduring." (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Vol I, section V, chapter II.)

Keshab listened in silence and smiled ; for it was Ramakrishna's smile that shed a light of mysterious serenity into the funeral darkness of the house and into the sufferings of the sick man. Ramakrishna did not adopt a solemn tone until Keshab, exhausted, was about to leave him. Then he suggested to the dying man that he ought not to live so much in the inner room with the women and children, but alone with God.

And it is said that in his death agony, Keshab's last words were : "Mother ! . . . . . Mother ! . . . . "[1]

It is so easy to understand how this great idealist, who believed in God, Reason, Goodness, Justice and Truth, should have discovered during these tragic days that he was too far away from the High God, the Unattainable God, and that he needed to draw near to Him and to touch Him with the dust of Ramakrishna's feet, to see Him and hear Him through Ramakrishna, and find refreshment for his fever. Such is an expression

[1] The repercussion of some of Ramakrishna's words, spoken during his last interview with Keshab, on the latter's last thoughts, has, I think, never before been noticed.

Ramakrishna spoke to him for a long time about the Mother and said : "She watches over Her children. . . . . She knows how to obtain true freedom and knowledge for them. . . . The child knows nothing. . . . Its Mother knows everything. . . . . All is ordered according to Her will. 'You fulfil Your own will, O Divine Mother, and accomplish Your own work. The foolish man says : "It is I, who have accomplished." ' "

Moreover, when Keshab in the midst of his own sufferings was consoling his real, mortal mother, who had given him life, he said : "The Supreme Mother sends everything for my good. She plays with me, turning sometimes to one side, sometimes to the other."

of universal experience. But it is just this for which some of Keshab's proud disciples cannot forgive Ramakrishna. On the other hand, I must beg the Ramakrishnites not to make too much of it, but rather let them follow the example of their sweet master. When Keshab had just left him after this last interview here described, Ramakrishna spoke modestly and with admiration of Keshab's greatness, which had won the respect both of a social and intellectual elite and of simple believers like himself. And he continued to show his esteem for the Brahmo Samaj.[1] The best of the Brahmos have held him in veneration in their

[1] In 1878 after the fresh schisms within the Brahmo Samaj, Ramakrishna remained faithful to Keshab when he was deserted by a section of his disciples. But he refused to make any distinction between the three separate branches of the Brahmo Samaj, joining them all alike in prayer. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* has recorded several of these visits, in particular one of October 28, 1882, when he was invited and was present at the annual festival of Keshab's Brahmo Samaj. He was eagerly surrounded and questioned on religious problems, and replied with his usual breadth of spirit. He took part in the songs (the song of Kabir), and in the sacred dances. When he retired he saluted all forms of devotion, ending up with homage to the Brahmo Samaj: "Salutations to the feet of the Jnanin! Salutations to the feet of the Bhakta! Salutations to the devout who believe in God with form! Salutations to the devout who believe in a God without form! Salutations to the ancient knowers of Brahman! Salutations to the modern knowers of the Brahmo Samaj!"

The other two branches of the Brahmo Samaj showed him far less regard. The most recent, the Sadharan Samaj, owed him a grudge on account of his influence over Keshab. At the Adi Brahmo Samaj of Devendranath he was doubtless regarded as belonging to a lower level. At one visit which he paid to it (May 2, 1883), and which Rabindranath Tagore may perhaps remember, since he was present as a lad, his reception was hardly courteous. (*Cf. The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*).

turn,[1] and have known how to profit from their intercourse with him. His influence widened their understanding and their heart and did more than anybody else's to bring them into line in people's estimation with the best thought of India, which the first influx of the scientific knowledge of the West, badly assimilated, had threatened to alienate.

One example will suffice: his great disciple, Vivekananda, came from the ranks of the Brahmo Samaj and from the most bigoted, at least for a time, of iconoclasts in the name of Western reason against Hindu tradition, which later he learnt to respect and defend. The true thought of the West has lost nothing through this Hindu awakening. The thought of the East is now independent, and henceforth union can be effected between equal and free personalities, instead of the one being subjugated by the other, and one of the two civilisations being assassinated by the other.

[1] Especially Kehab's successor, Pratap Chunder Mozoomdar, and Vijay Krishna Gosvami, who later on separated himself from the Brahmo Samaj. The great composer and singer of Keshab's Samaj, Trailokya Nath Sannyal, maintains that many of his most beautiful songs were inspired by the ecstasies of Ramakrishna.

VIII

THE CALL OF THE DISCIPLES

It is easy to see what India gained from the meeting of Ramakrishna and the Brahmo Samaj. His own gain is less obvious, but no less definite. For the first time he found himself brought into personal contact with the educated middle class of his country, and through them with the pioneers of progress and Western ideas. He had previously known practically nothing of their mentality.

He was not a man to react like a strict and narrow devotee, who hastens to put up the shutters of his cell. On the contrary he flung them wide open. He was too human, too insatiably curious, too greedy for the fruit of the tree of life not to taste these new fruits to the full. His long searching glance insinuated itself like a creeper through the chinks of the house, and studied all the different habitations of the same Host, and studied all the different spirits dwelling therein, and in order to understand them better, he identified himself with them. He grasped their limitations (as well as their significance), and proportioned to each nature its own vision of life and individual duty. He never dreamed of imposing either vision or action alien to his proper nature on any man. He, to whom renunciation both then and always, so far as he was personally concerned, was the first and last word of truth, discovered that most men would

have none of it, and he was neither astonished nor saddened by the discovery. The differences men busied themselves in raising between them like hedges, seemed to him nothing but bushes all flowering in the same field and giving variety to the scene.[1] He loved them all. He could see the goal and the path assigned to each one of them, and pointed out to each the road he was to follow. When he spoke to an individual, one of the things most astonishing to the onlookers was the way he instantaneously adopted just the individual's particular turn of phrase and method of expressing his thoughts. This was not mere versatility. His spirit kept firm control of the steering wheel, and if he led men to another point of the bank, it was always the bank of God. He helped them unawares to land by their own power. Because he believed that all nature was of God, he felt that it was his duty to guide each nature along its own lines so that it might attain its fullest development. The realisation that he possessed this gift of spiritual guidance, came upon him without his own volition. A western proverb, adopted as Its motto by the Italian Renaissance, claims that "*Vouloir, c'est pouvoir.*"[2] This is the beautiful bragging of youth with everything still to do.

[1] Somebody once asked him what difference there was between the Brahmos and the other Hindus. "No very great one," he replied. "In a concert of hautboys one holds on the same note while the others weave variations beneath it. The Brahmos always come back to the same note, the formless aspect of God. But the Hindus play His different aspects."

[2] "*Vouloir, c'est pouvoir*" literally translated means: "To wish is to be able."

A more mature man, who is not so easily satisfied with words, but who lays emphasis on deeds, reverses the motto so that it reads: "*Pouvoir, c'est vouloir.*"[1]

Ramakrishna suddenly perceived the power within him and the call of the world for its use. The ascendancy he exercised over some of the best minds in India revealed the weakness and needs of these intellectuals, their unsatisfied aspirations, the inadequacy of the answers they gained from science, and the necessity for his intervension. The Brahmo Samaj showed him what strength of organisation, what beauty existed in a spiritual group uniting young souls round an elder brother, so that they tendered a basket of love as a joint offering to their Beloved, the Mother.

The immediate result was that his mission, hitherto undefined, became crystallised; it concentrated first in a glowing nucleus of conscious thought wherein decision was centred, and then passed into action.

First of all he saw in their entirety his own relations with God. He saw that this God within him[2] could not be satisfied with personal salvation, as was the case with other Sadhakas, but

[1] "*Pouvoir, c'est vouloir*": "To be able is to wish."

[2] Ramakrishna admitted at this point what the Bhairavi Brahmani had been the first to proclaim, that he was Divine Incarnation. But he disliked to talk about it, and could not bear it to be mentioned in front of him. In general, praise was disagreeable to him. He was much more prone to refuse in public all spiritual privileges, to the dissatisfaction of some of his followers, who would have liked a share in them. His conviction lay in an inward act, a secret light, which he never paraded. I would ask my Western readers a question that may

required of him the love and service of mankind.[1] His spiritual struggles, his ecstasies, his realisations were not to be only for his own profit.

"*Sic vos non vobis* . . . ."[2]

They were meant rather to prepare the way for human development, for a new era of spiritual realisation. Other men had the right to aspire to and hope for liberation, but not he. He could not count on that. From century to century he was obliged to go to the help of mankind whenever they were in danger.[3]

And here is the rallying cry, the word of salvation that he was to carry to the men of his day.[4]

1. All religions are true in their essence and in the sincere faith of their believers. The revelation of this universal truth, whereat Ramakrishna had arrived by common sense as much

shock them—whether the passionate conviction of a mission imposing thought and action upon our great men is not vaguely akin to exactly some such intuition, some fullness of Being transcending the limits of personality? What does it matter by what name it is called?

[1] The word "service" inscribed by Ramakrishna's disciples above their Mission was not explicitly pronounced by the Master. But his whole doctrine of love working for others to the limits of personal sacrifice is in essence the doctrine of service. Service, as Swami Ashokananda has well shown, is its motive force. (*Cf. Prabuddha Bharata*, Almora, February 1928: "The Origin of Swami Vivekananda's Doctrine of Service"). We shall return to this question in the next volume.

[2] A frequently quoted verse of Virgil, meaning: "You work, but not for yourself."

[3] As a curious fact I note here that Ramakrishna said, pointing to the north-west, that after two hundred years he would be reincarnated there. (Russia?)

[4] *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 342-7.

as by intuition, was the special object of his coming upon the earth.

2. The three great orders of metaphysical thought: Dualism, "qualified" Monism and absolute Monism, are the stages on the way to supreme truth. They are not contradictory, but rather are complementary, the one to the other. Each is the perspective offered to the mental standpoint of one order of individuals. For the masses, who are attracted through the senses, a dualistic form of religion with ceremonies, music, images and symbols is useful. The pure intellect can arrive at qualified Monism; it knows that there is a beyond; but it cannot realise it. Realisation belongs to another order, the Advaita, the inexplicable, the formless Absolute, of which the discipline of Yoga gives a foretaste. It surpasses the logical means of word and spirit. It is the last word of "Realisation." It is Identity with the One Reality.

3. To this scale of thought there is naturally a corresponding scale of duties. The ordinary man lives in the world and can and does fulfil his duties there, striving with affectionate zeal but without attachment to self, just as a good servant takes care of a house, although he is quite aware that the house is not his. By purity and love he is to achieve liberation from his desires. But only step by step with patience and modesty.

"Only undertake those actions that fall within the limits of your purified thoughts and dreams. Seek not to flatter yourself with gigantic deeds. Undertake duties as small in size as your self-surrender to God. Then as your selflessness

and purity grow—and things of the Soul grow very fast—it will pierce its own way through the material world and benefit others as the Ganges sprang through the hard rocks of the Himalayas and watered thousand of miles with her beneficence "[1].

Do not be in a hurry, but progress each at his own pace ! You are sure to arrive at your destination, so there is no need to run ! But you must not stop ! " Religion is a path which leads to God, but a path is not a house. . . ."—" And will it be a long one ? "—" That depends. It is the same for all. But some march for a longer time and the end draws near. . . ."

" The potter dries his pots in the sun. Some are already baked, others not. The cattle pass on and tread them under foot. (Then comes death). . . . The potter picks up the pots again and if one is not quite baked he replaces it on the wheel ; he does not let it go. But when the sun of God has completed your baking, the potter leaves the remains, now of no further use on the plane of Maya, except for one or two finished vessels to serve as models for humanity."[2]

Ramakrishna was one such, and his mission was to seek those who were a stage behind him[3] and with them, in fulfilment of the Mother's will, to found a new order of men, who would transmit his message and teach to the world his word of truth containing all the others. This word was " Universal "—the Union and Unity of all the as-

[1] *Cf.* D. G. Mukherji, *op. cit.*

[2] Interview with Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, December 6, 1884.

[3] He said : " to those who are in their last birth "

pects of God, of all the transports of love and knowledge, of all form of humanity. Until then nobody had sought to realise more than one aspect of the Being. All must be realised. That was the duty of the present day. And the man who fulfilled it by identifying himself with each and all of his living brethren, taking unto himself their eyes, their senses, their brain and heart, was the pilot and the guide for the needs of the new age.[1]

*

No sooner had he perceived this vision than he was afire with the desire to realise it.[2] Like a bird-charmer he flung a passionate appeal into the air to other winged spirits to come and group themselves round his dovecote. The time was ripe. He could wait no longer. He must collect his covey round him. Night and day the thought of these beloved companions possessed him. He cried in his heart. . . .

[1] *Cf.* Swami Ashokananda, *loc. cit.*

[2] It was revealed to Sri Ramakrishna about 1863 that many faithful and pure-hearted souls would come to him. (*Cf. Life of Sri Ramakrishna,* p. 203). But Ramakrishna had hardly given it a thought before 1866. According to Saradananda, it was at the end of the long Samadhi of that year that a violent desire for his future disciples came upon him. Every evening he prayed for their advent with loud cries. The climax of this crisis was towards the end of the next six years, (1866-72), which further period was necessary for Ramakrishna to reach the height of his powers as a teacher, and to understand the spiritual condition of the India of his age. Towards the close of this period, in a vision his future disciples appeared to him. (*Cf. The Life of Swami Vivekananda,* I, 360). He first began to preach at the end of 1874 or the beginning of 1875, when he made Keshab's acquaintance. His preaching may be considered to fall within the period of twelve years from 1874 to August 1886.

"My ardent desire knew no bounds. That very day for good or ill, I had to realise it. I no longer listened to what was said round me. . . . . They filled my mind. I could see them. I decided in advance what I should say to this one and that one. . . . . By the end of the day the thought of them weighed upon me. . . . . Another day had gone and still they had not come! . . . . The clocks struck, the conches sounded. I went up onto the roof in the fading light and with bleeding heart cried aloud: 'Come, my children! Where are you? I cannot live without you. . . .' I loved them more than mother, friend or lover; I desired them; I was dying in their absence."

This mighty cry of the soul soared up into the night like the sacred serpent; and its attraction was exerted over the winged spirits. From all directions, without understanding what command or what power constrained them they felt themselves drawn, as if caught by an invisible thread; they circled, they approached and soon one after another they arrived.

The first disciples to present themselves (this was in 1879) were two middle class intellectuals from Calcutta. They were cousins: the one, a medical student at the Calcutta Medical College, an absolute materialist and atheist: Ramchandra Dutt; the other, married and the head of a family: Manomohan Mitra. Some lines in a Brahmo Samaj journal mentioning Ramakrishna had attracted their attention. They came and they were conquered. They did not renounce the world and Ramakrishna did nothing to

detach them from it ; but the extraordinary man captivated them by his charm and his character. It was they who brought him his two greatest disciples—the one who became the first abbot of the Ramakrishna Order, under the name of Brahmananda (Rakhal Chandra Ghosh), and he whose genius was to enlighten India and the whole world under the name of Vivekananda (Narendranath Dutt).

Before considering the chief personalities, here is a short list of the best known of the men, who between the years 1879 and 1885[1] grouped themselves round Ramakrishna, together with some indication of their birth and profession as far as it is possible to draw up :

1879 : 1 and 2. Doctor Ramchandra Dutt and his cousin, Manomohan Mitra ;
3. Latu, Ramchandra's servant, of low birth from Behar, later known by the monastic name of Adbhutananda ;
4. Surendranath Mitra, a rich employee in an English trading house, a householder and member of the Brahmo Samaj ;

1881 : 5. Rakhal Chandra Ghosh, son of a Zemindar (landed proprietor), later the first abbot of the Order under the name of Brahmananda) ;
6. Gopal the elder, a paper merchant (later Advaitananda) ;

[1] According to Saradananda, all Ramakrishna's disciples arrived before the end of 1884, and most of them between the middle of 1883 and the middle of 1884.

7. Narendranath Dutt, a young intellectual, belonging to a Kshatriya family, (later Vivekananda) ;

1882 : 8. Mahendra Nath Gupta, the principal of the Vidyasagar High School at Shambazar, Calcutta, who has since written *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* under the pseudonym M., and who, unless I am mistaken, directs the school he founded, the Morton Institution ;

9. Tarak Nath Ghoshal, the son of a lawyer, a member of the Brahmo Samaj, the present abbot of the Order under the name of Shivananda ;

10. Jogendra Nath Chaudhury, a Brahmin of Dakshineswar belonging to an aristocratic family, (later Yogananda) ;

1883 : 11. Sasibhusan (later Ramakrishnananda) ;

12. Saratchandra Chakravarti (later Saradananda), the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission for more than a quarter of a century and the great biographer of Ramakrishna, both Brahmins of Calcutta and members of the Brahmo Samaj ;

13. Kaliprasad Chandra, the son of a professor of English (later Abhedananda) ;

14. Harinath Chattopadhyaya, a Brahmin, (later Turiyananda) ;
15. Hariprasanna Chatterjee, a student (Vijnanananda) ;

1884: 16. Gangadhar Ghatak, a young student of fourteen, (later Akhandananda) ;
17. Girish Chandra Ghosh, a great actor and dramatist, the founder of the modern Bengali theatre, director of the Star Theatre at Calcutta ;

1885: 18. Subodh Ghosh, a student of seventeen, the son of a founder of a temple of Kali at Calcutta, (later Subodhananda) ;
19. Purnachandra Ghosh, who was one of the six chief disciples, and who came to Ramakrishna when he was only thirteen years of age.

I have not been able to find the exact dates for the entry of the following :

20. The rich proprietor, Balaram Bose, a mature and exceedingly pious man, whose gifts helped in the foundation of the Order ;
21. The young spiritualistic medium, Nitya Niranjan Ghosh, whom Ramakrishna rescued by main force from occult beliefs,[1] and who was later Niranjanananda ;
22. Devendra Mazumdar, a mature married man, an employee of a

[1] "If you always think of ghosts, you will become a ghost. If you think of God, you will be God. Choose!"

Zemindar and brother of the Bengali poet, Surendranath ;

23. Baburam Ghosh, a student about twenty years of age (later Premananda) ;
24. Tulsi Charan Dutt, a student of eighteen (later Nirmalananda).
25. Durga Charan Nag, who was the chief disciple living in the world, a real saint of the Golden Legend. . . . . etc.[1]

It can be seen that with the exception of the poor servant, Latu, the majority belonged to the liberal professions, to the Brahmin aristocracy or to the rich middle class of Bengal. They were either young men or in the prime of life, and several had been fashioned by the Brahmo Samaj. But I have only mentioned those who joined Ramakrishna strictly and who were the exponents of his thought.

An ever shifting crowd of all classes and all castes inundated him with its restless movement. They came jumbled together, Maharajahs and beggars, journalists and pandits, artists and devotees, Brahmos, Christians and Mohammedans, men of faith, men of action and business, old men,

[1] The name of Saradaprasanna Mitra (Swami Trigunatitananda) who was one of the monastic disciples of the Master, has been omitted from the list. Swami Nirmalananda, though he met Sri Ramakrishna, was actually a disciple of Swami Vivekananda.

According to *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* in Bengali, Vol. I, p. 6, the dates of some disciples' meeting the Master are as follows :

Gopal met him earlier than 1879 ; Tarak came before 1881 ; Baburam, Balaram and Nitya Niranjan either at the end of 1881 or beginning of 1882 ; and Devendra in 1884—*Publisher.*

women and children. Often they journeyed from afar to question him, and there was no rest for him day or night. For twenty hours out of the twenty-four he replied to all comers. Although his weakened health failed under the strain, he refused nobody, but gave out to all alike his sympathy, his enlightenment, and that strange power of soul, which, even if he did not speak a word, gripped the hearts of his visitors and left them transformed for days. He won the respect of all sincere believers, and gladly received men of different faiths so that they might discuss their diversities before him and he might reconcile them.

But this to him was only one of the factors making for harmony. He desired something infinitely greater than the reconciliation of warring creeds—that man as a whole should understand, sympathise with and love the rest of mankind—that he should identify himself with the life of humanity. For, since Divinity is inherent in every man, every life for him was a religion, and should so become for all. And the more we love mankind, however diverse, the nearer we are to God.[1] It was unnecessary to seek Him in temples, or to call upon Him for miracles and revelations. He was here, everywhere, every second. We could see Him, we could touch Him, for He was our brother, our friend, our enemy, our very self. And it was because this omnipresent God flowed from the soul of Ramakrishna, because his light illumined, quietly and imperceptibly

[1] "Are you seeking God? Then seek Him in man! The Divinity is manifest in man more than in any other object." (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*).

tibly, the crowd surrounding him, that men felt themselves, without understanding why, uplifted and strengthened.

He said to his disciples:

"We have to build on other foundations now. We must live such an intense inner life that it will become a Being. And Being will send forth untold torches of truth. Rivers rise and rush because their sire, the mountain sits still. . . . Let us raise a mountain of God in our midst no matter how long it takes, and when it will have been reared it will pour rivers of compassion and light on all men for all time."[1]

There was then no question of founding or of expounding a new creed:

"Mother," Premananda heard him pray, "do not let me become famous by leading those who believe in beliefs to me! Do not expound beliefs through my voice."

And he warned his disciples against any kind of Ramakrishnaism.

Above all things there must be no barriers!

"A river has no need of barriers. If it dams itself up it stagnates and becomes foul."

Rather the gates must be flung wide open, the gates of oneself and of other people so that all-conquering Unity might be created. This was to be the real part for his chosen disciples—by their common effort they were to "recreate the Being who was to nourish the men and women of the centuries to be."

Their part was to be an active one, demanding great gifts and wide tolerance of spirit and heart.

[1] D. G. Mukerji, *op. cit.*

Nobody must stint himself, but give himself wholly.

That is why although all men, without exception, were called into the Divine community, he showed himself very strict in the choice of his disciples ; for they were the way, whereon the feet of humanity was to march. He claimed that it was not he, but the Mother, who chose them.[1] But was the Mother any different from the entity we carry in the depths of ourselves ? This entity in the case of those, who, like Ramakrishna, have acquired the exceptional power of keeping intact an intense solitary concentration in the midst of a life passed in the midst of an innumerable throng, possesses antennae, which infallibly seek out the inner man. At the most furtive contact they sound the depths, the capacities and the weaknesses, the virtues and the vices, things obscure even to the person under observation, that which is and that which will be. Ordinary men are apt to call in question the reality of this gift of intuitive vision, which reaches from the present into the future. But it is neither more nor less outside the limits of nature than the vibrations of the rod of the " Diviner " on the surface of the earth revealing the water beneath.

Ramakrishna was a wonderful wand in the hand

[1] " I did not choose them. The Divine Mother led them to me. She made me examine them. At night I meditate, the veil falls and reveals them to me. You can then see the ego of a man or a woman as through a glass case. . . I satisfy myself concerning the character of my disciples before I initiate them."

What man of intuition can fail to recognise this method of thought, the use of this inward eye opening under lowered lids, in the lonely centre of the spirit, on the still warm spoils

of the Mother. Extraordinary tales are told of his physical and spiritual hyper-sensitiveness. Towards the end of his life such was his horror of riches that he could no longer touch gold without being burnt.[1] It is also maintained that the mere touch of an impure person gave him physical pain analogous to the bite of a cobra.[2]

At sight he could read the soul of those who approached him, and so, if he accepted them as his disciples, it was with full knowledge.[3] He dis-

of the world, captured by the lure of the senses? Only the mode of expression varies and the intensity of the eye.

[1] Vivekananda relates: "Even when he was sleeping, if I touched him with a piece of money, his hand would become bent and his whole body would become as it were paralysed." (*My Master*).

[2] In illustration of this legendary trait: One day when in the kindness of his heart he had consented to touch a man, who, though outwardly without reproach, was inwardly defiled, and who insisted that Ramakrishna should enrol him among his disciples, Ramakrishna howled with pain. He said to the man sorrowfully and kindly: "The touch of divine bliss has become in you a cobra's poison. It is not in this life, my son!" and continued under his breath: "your liberation."

A thousand other instances of this hyper-sensitiveness might be related. A blow given to a man in the street by a furious enemy left its physical mark on the flesh of Ramakrishna. His nephew saw his back red and inflamed at the sight of a man whose back was scored with the whip. And Girish Chandra Ghosh, whose witness is unimpeachable, has certified to the fact of his stigmata. This spiritual contact with all forms of life made him at one even with animals and plants. It has been said of him that he felt a brutal step upon the earth as it were upon his own heart.

[3] He did not blindly depend upon his own intuition. He visited the tutors of his young disciples, he learnt all about them and studied them in meditation. With a remarkable and scrupulous attention he noted their physiological characteristics of respiration, sleep and even digestion. He held that they were of considerable importance in confirming his diagnosis of their spiritual faculties and destiny.;

covered in a hardly formed adolescent with character scarcely developed the exact task for which he had been born. Sometimes he discovered a great destiny, suspected least of all by the person concerned. Perhaps he helped such destiny to be born by announcing it. This great moulder of souls cast with his fingers of fire the bronze of Vivekananda as well as the delicate and tender wax of Yogananda or Brahmananda. A curious fact is that the most resolute to resist him were bound sooner or later to yield to the spiritual election he had made. They then brought as much passion into play in submitting to him as they had formerly used in withstanding him. He had the power of divining, seizing and keeping those spirits foreordained for his mission, and it would appear that the hawk-eye of the Paramahamsa was never mistaken.

IX

THE MASTER AND HIS CHILDREN

It is possible to divide the train of great souls, with which he surrounded himself, into two classes: a third order,[1] as it were, of men and women, who remained serving God in the world, and the chosen band of apostles.

Let us first consider the former: for these disciples of listeners belonging to the second (third order) illustrate the spirit of broad "catholicity" animating Ramakrishna, and to what an extent his religion took into account, for others as well as for himself, the common duties of humanity.

He did not ask men of goodwill to leave all and follow him. On the contrary he was careful to refrain from saying "Forsake all to seek salvation!" to those already caught by worldly ties, such as married people and fathers of families.

He forbade his disciples to sacrifice the legitimate rights of others "just because you, my son, wish to become a holy man." Personal salvation was mere selfishness in too many cases, and therefore resulted in a worse death of the soul.

". . . We owe a debt to the gods. We owe

[1] Third order: It was the name given by St. Francis of Assisi to a half lay, half religious order, to which pious people living in the world could (and can still) belong.

a debt to parents. We owe a debt to our wives. . . . No work can be satisfactorily concluded until the debt to parents at least has been paid. . . . Harish gave up his wife and lives here. But if his wife had not been provided for, I should have called him a wicked fellow. . . . There are those who are constantly quoting Scriptures, but their deeds and their words do not tally. Rama Prasanna says that Manu ordered that Sadhus should be served. And his old mother was dying of hunger and was obliged to beg for what she needed! . . . That enrages me! Not even a depraved mother ought to be deserted. . . . So long as parents remain in want, the practice of devotion avails nothing."[1]

"The brother of S. came here for several days. He had left his wife and his children in the care of his brother-in-law. I rebuked him severely. . . . . Was it not criminal to leave his home, when he had so many children to bring up? Was it for strangers to feel them and be troubled with them? It was a scandal! . . . I told him to go and look for work. . . . ."

"You should bring up your children, provide for your wife, and put by what is necessary for her to live upon after your death. If you do not do so, you are heartless; and a man without compassion is unworthy of the name of man."[2]

"I tell people that they must fulfil their duties in the world as well as think about God. I do not ask them to renounce all. (*Smiling*) The other day in the course of a lecture, Keshab

[1] *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, II, 251 *et seq.*
[2] *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 587.

said: 'O God, grant that we may be plunged in the river of Devotion and attain the Ocean of Satchidananda (Being, Knowledge, Eternal Felicity)!' The women were present sitting behind a screen. I showed them to Keshab and said: 'If you are all plunged in at once, what will be their fate? . . . . So you must come out of the water from time to time; immerse yourselves and come out alternately!' Keshab and the others began to laugh. . . . ."[1]

"Your duty as a married man is to live with your wife as brother and sister as soon as one or two children have been born, and to pray to God that you may be granted the power to live a perfect spiritual life exercising self-control."[2]

"Undoubtedly a man, who has once tasted the bliss of God, finds the world insipid. To lead a

[1] *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, II, p. 266.

The peasant's son knew much more about the necessities of existence than the rich Keshab, and that there is more merit if a poor workman finds a place, for one single thought of God during the day, than if he consecrated hours to religious offices like an idle devotee.

"One day (here is one of his pregnant and piquant parables) Narada thought that he was the most pious of men. The Lord told him to go and see a peasant who was more pious than he. He went. The peasant invoked the name of Hari when he got up and when he went to bed; the rest of the day he worked in the fields. Narada did not understand. Then the Lord told him to take a cup filled to the brim with oil and to carry it round the town without spilling a drop. Narada obeyed. When he came back without having spilt a drop, the Lord asked: 'How many times did you think of Me?' 'Lord, how could I think of You? My mind was concentrated on the cup of oil.' Thus the Lord made Narada understand how great was the peasant's devotion, who, in spite of his work, did not forget to call upon His name." (*Sri Ramakrishna's Teachings*, I, par. 45).

[2] *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, I, p. 403.

religious life in the world is to stay in a room with only a feeble ray of light. Those who are used to the open air cannot live in prison.[1] But, if you live in a house you have duties to perform. Learn in accomplishing them always to enjoy the ray of light. Do not lose a particle of it, and never lose touch with it; when you are at work, use only one of your hands, and let the other touch the feet of the Lord. When your work is suspended, take His feet in both your hands and put them over your heart! . . .[2] What will you gain, if you renounce the world? Family life is a fortress for you. Moreover, he who has attained knowledge, is always free. It is only the lunatic, who says 'I am enchained,' that ends by being so. . . . . The mind is all in all. If it is free, you are free. Whether in the forest or in the world I am not enchained. I am the son of God, the King of Kings. Who then dare put me in chains? . . . ."

So he offered each one the means of freedom—to drink from an inner spring, to share the joy of universal Existence, which is God, contained within each and every individual, without going against his own nature, without mutilating it or "forcing" it, and above all without wronging one hair of the head of anyone dependent upon him. Far from forbidding a man to feel legitimate affection, he showed it to be a means of enlightenment, a peaceful canal with beautiful reflections, leading the pure and the simple to God. Here is a charming example:

[1] Interview with Trailokya Nath Sanyal.
[2] Interview with Keshab and his disciples, 1882.

The daughter of one of his disciples (Manilal Mallik) was troubled. She told him sorrowfully that when she prayed she could not concentrate. Ramakrishna asked her :

"What do you love best in the world ?"

She replied that it was her brother's little child.

"Very well,' answered the affectionate Master, "fix your thoughts upon him."

She did so and through the little boy she grew in devotion to the child Krishna.[1]

How I love this flower of tenderness in him ! What deep significance it has ! Each one of us, be his heart as dark as night, has the divine spark in the most humble impulse of true love. There is nobody quite destitute of a tiny lamp, just enough to light up his path. And all ways are good ways —even the bad ones,[2] and each individual destiny,

[1] Here is another anecdote of the same kind :

A good grandmother grew old, and wished to adopt a religious life at Brindaban. Ramakrishna dissuaded her, on the ground that she loved her grand-daughter too much and that her meditations would be troubled by thoughts of her. He added :

"All the good you could expect from living at Brindaban will come of its own accord to you, if you cultivate your sweet affection for your grand-daughter in the thought that she is Sri Radhika Herself. Fondle her just as much as you are wont ; feed and dress her to your heart's content, but always think to yourself that in those acts you are offering your worship to the goddess of Brindaban." (*Sri Ramakrishna's Teachings,* I, par. 70.)

And so live your life and love your dear ones in innocence and peace ! This means that you see God under their dear veil and give Him thanks.

[2] "The vital point is your ardent desire for Truth, whatever be the path you follow. God knows the secrets of your heart ; and it matters little if you take the wrong path, so long as you are sincere. He Himself will lead you back to the right path. It is well known that no road is perfect. Each person

provided that every man follows his own with loyal sincerity. The rest is God's business. Have confidence then and go forward !

And how deeply and indulgently Ramakrishna's "Maternal"[1] eye penetrated and understood, so that he knew how to guide the troubled souls of the most lost of his children, is shown in the story, worthy of the Franciscan legends, of his relations with the comedian, Girish Chandra Ghosh.

This great actor and dramatist was a Bohemian and a debauchee, a rebel against God, although his genius enabled him on occasions to write beautiful religious works.[2] But he regarded such writing as a game. He did not realise a fact that struck Ramakrishna at the first glance, that he himself was the plaything of God.

He heard people talk of the Paramahamsa, and was curious to see him, as he might have been curious to see a freak in a circus. At their first meeting he was drunk and he insulted him. Ramakrishna in a calm and bantering tone said to him :

"At least you might drink to God ! Perhaps He drinks as well. . . ."

The drunkard, his mouth agape, exclaimed :

"How do you know?"

"If He did not drink, how could He have created this topsyturvy world ?"

believes that his watch goes well ; but in truth none shows the correct time. But that does not hinder people's work. . . . ." (*Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 647.)

[1] Maternal : of the Divine Mother.

[2] Some of them have been translated from Bengali into English. He is regarded as one of the greatest Bengali dramatists

Girish remained in stupefied silence. When he had gone, Ramakrishna said quietly to his astounded disciples :

"That man is a great devotee[1] of God."

At his own invitation he went to see Girish act in his Calcutta theatre.[2] Girish was vain and looked for compliments. But Ramakrishna said to him :

"My son, you suffer from a crooked soul."

Girish was furious and loaded him with insults. Ramakrishna blessed him and went away. The next day Girish came to beg his pardon, and became a disciple of Ramakrishna. But he could not give up drinking. Ramakrishna never asked him to do so, with the result that eventually Girish broke the habit ; for Ramakrishna had strengthened his resolution by allowing him to feel that he was absolutely free.

But this was not enough. Ramakrishna told him that to refrain from doing evil was too negative a virtue ; he must draw near to God. Girish found this impossible, for he had never been able to submit to discipline. In despair he said that he would prefer suicide to meditation and prayer.

"I am not asking you for much," Ramakrishna replied. "Just one prayer before you eat, and one prayer before you go to bed. Can you not do it ?"

"No ; I hate routine. I cannot pray or meditate. I cannot even think of God for a second."

[1] "Devotee" is used here, as elsewhere in this book, as meaning, devoted to God, one who has given himself wholly to God.

[2] Towards the end of 1884. He was present at one of the first performances of *Chaitanya-lila*.

"Good," replied Ramakrishna. "Well, if you really desire to see the Lord, but if at the same time you will not take a single step towards Him, will you make me your proxy? I will do your praying for you, while you will lead your own life. But take care; you must promise me to live from henceforth absolutely at the Lord's mercy."

Girish accepted his suggestion without fully realising the consequences. His life was no longer under the control of his own will, but at the mercy of inner forces, like a leaf in the wind, or like a kitten whose mother can carry it equally well onto a king's bed as a dust-heap.[1] He had to accept this condition without demur, and it was not easy. Girish struggled loyally, but once he was driven to say:

"Yes, I will do it."

"What did you say?" Ramakrishna cried sternly. "You have no longer the will to do or not to do. Remember! . . . . I am your proxy. Your behaviour is according to the will of the Lord within you. I pray for you; but my prayers will avail nothing unless you abandon all initiative."

Girish submitted, and the result of this discipline was that after a time he attained self-surrender to the impersonal Self; he was conquered by God.

But he did not renounce his profession as

[1] "Like a cat" (Màrjari), is a classical simile of Bhakti. The cat saves its kittens by carrying them inert. Certain sects of Southern India conceive thus of salvation. They believe it is accomplished exclusively by God. (*Cf.* Paul Masson-Oursel: *Sketch of the History of Indian Philosophy*, p. 247.)

dramatist and actor, and Ramakrishna never desired it. Instead he purified it. He had been the first to introduce women onto the Bengal stage, and now he rescued many unfortunate girls from misery and uplifted them. Afterwards he took them to Ramakrishna's monastery. He became one of the most religious followers of the Master, one of the greatest of his householder disciples. Notwithstanding his freedom of speech and caustic humour, he was respected and venerated after the Master's death by the monastic disciples.

As he was dying, he said:

"The folly of matter is a terrible veil. Take it away from my eyes, Ramakrishna!"[1]

*

And so, his religious sense, a sixth sense more highly developed in him than any of the others, revealed to Ramakrishna those among the passers-by, who were predestined for a divine sowing, those in whom God was sleeping. One glance, one gesture, was enough to awaken it. Nearly all the disciples yielded to him at the first meeting the vibrations of their inner being, whether they wished to do so or not. He scrutinised them through and through. Other men had only their own salvation to find, but the true disciples were to be leaders and have the charge of other souls. That was why, when they were recruited, they were, as I have said, subjected to physical[2] and

[1] I have followed the narrative of D. G. Mukerji in this account. (But Mukerji's narrative is unfortunately misleading, his book being full of distorted facts and fancies.—*Publisher*).

[2] He was very particular about perfect health. The chief disciples, Vivekananda, Brahmananda, Saradananda, Turiya-

moral examination, followed after their admission by a paternal and ever watchful discipline.

He preferred them young, sometimes very young, hardly adolescent,[1] and unmarried, "not yet caught in the net of desire, nor entrapped by riches, free from ties. . . ." If, like Brahmananda, they were married, he examined the wife as well, and satisfied himself that she would help and not hinder her young husband in his mission. In general the disciples of this unlettered man were well-educated and knew at least one foreign language in addition to Sanskrit. But this was not an essential; the example of Latu is significant, although it may be said that he was the exception to prove the rule. A humble and ignorant servant, a peasant of Behar and a stranger to Bengal, he was awakened to eternal life by one glance from Ramakrishna, for he possessed unwittingly the same genius of heart as the Master.

"Many of us," said Swami Turiyananda, "had to go through the muddy waters of knowledge before we attained God, but Latu jumped over them, like Hanuman."

What did Ramakrishna teach his disciples? Vivekananda has emphasised the originality of his methods, especially in the India of his day; since then some of his educational principles have been adopted and systematised by the new schools

nanda, etc. seem to have been of athletic build, tall and broad, and possessing rare physical strength. I repeat that he was always careful to examine the tongue, the chest, the working of the organs, before sanctioning the exercises of intensive meditation.

[1] Turiyananda was fourteen years old, Subodhananda seventeen

of Europe. Up to that time in India the word of the master was law. A Guru exacted from his Chelas (pupils) a deeper respect than that paid to parents. Ramakrishna would have none of it. He put himself on a level with his young disciples. He was their companion, their brother; he talked familiarly with them and without any trace of superiority. The advice he gave them was not his own. It came from the Mother through his lips. "What has it to do with me?" Moreover, words are mere accessories; they are not instruction. True instruction does not consist in inculcating doctrine[1] but in "communicating." But what is to be communicated? A man's self? Not even that, or rather something more than that —the One Self. Or we may describe it as the condition of inward abundance, of vital and digested riches, called "spirituality". And this is to be communicated "as a flower might be given," in the same way that a good gardener dispenses the sun and the sheltering shade to the budding souls entrusted to him, so that they may blossom and exhale their spiritual perfume. That is all. The rest comes from within them. "When the lotus is full blown, the bees come and collect the honey. Let the lotus of character expand naturally."

It followed, therefore, that the Master was very careful not to hinder their development by putting

[1] "Do not trouble yourselves with doctrine! It is the essence of Existence in each man, which counts; and this is spirituality. You must acquire it."

According to Vivekananda the principle of his teaching was: "First form character, first earn spirituality, and results will come of themselves." (*My Master*).

himself between the sun and these human plants. His respect for and love of the personality of others, his dread of enslaving it went so far that he was afraid of being loved too dearly. He did not wish the tenderness of his disciples for him to bind them.

"Let the bees suck your heart, but be careful that the beauty of your heart does not keep one of them captive!"

Still less was there any question of imposing his own ideas upon them. There was to be no established Credo! I have already quoted his words:

"Mother, do not expound beliefs through my voice!"

And ritual even less!

"God cannot be won by a system of ritual," but only by love and sincerity.

There were no fruitless discussions on metaphysics and theology!

"I do not like argument. God is above the powers of reason. I see that all which exists is God. Then of what avail to reason? . . . . Go into the garden, eat the sacred mangoes and go out again! You do not go in to count the leaves on the mango tree. So why waste time in disputes about reincarnation or idolatry?"[1]

What then did matter? Personal experience. Experiment first and then believe in God. Belief ought not to precede but to follow religious experience. If it comes first, it is inconsistent.

Nevertheless Ramakrishna presupposed *his* own

[1] *Cf. The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, passim.*

belief that God is in everything, that He is everything, and that it therefore follows that whoever opens his eyes and looks around him will of necessity end by meeting Him! This union with God was such a deep and constant[1] reality in his case that he did not feel any need to prove it, and he would never have dreamt of imposing it upon others. He was too certain that every sane and sincere seeker would arrive at it by himself, and through himself alone. His sole care was to make his disciples sane and sincere.

But who can gauge the moral influence of such a being wholly impregnated with God? It is obvious that his tranquil and constant vision was intermingled with his flesh, like the scent of pines in autumn honey, and hence it would percolate over the tongues of his young and starving disciples, who drank in eagerly his gestures and his movements. But he himself had no suspicion of it. He left them free, so be believed. He believed that God was simply spreading His perfume through his substance, like thyme when the wind blows over it. The thyme makes no effort to

[1] It even reached the pitch of hallucination:

"Do you know what I see? I see Him in all things. Men and the other creatures seem to me like miniature figures clothed in flesh; and it is the Lord within them that moves head and feet and hands. Once I had this vision: One Substance alone had taken all the forms of the Cosmos and all living creatures—a wax house, with garden, men, cows, all of wax—nothing but wax. . . . ." (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, I, p. 437).

"One day it was revealed to me that everything is pure Spirit. The temple vessels, the altar, men, beasts—all pure Spirit! And like a madman I began to rain flowers over everything. Everything that I saw, I worshipped. . . . ."

convince you. All you have to do is to smell its fresh scent!

This then was the essential part of Ramakrishna's discipline. A man must have and keep his body, senses and spirit honest and pure, unspotted, unworn, as young as Adam.

To achieve this the first rule was continence.

This rule, which our anti-clerics of the West claim with ingenuous ignorance to be a monopoly of the Church of Rome, and against which they are never tired of launching their old and blunted arrows, is as old as the world—(though if the whole world had applied it rigorously it would obviously never have lived to grow old). All great mystics and the majority of great idealists, the giants among the creators of the spirit have clearly and instinctively realised what formidable power of concentrated soul, of accumulated creative energy, is generated by a renunciation of the organic and psychic expenditure of sexuality. Even such free thinkers in matters of faith, and such sensualists as Beethoven, Balzac and Flaubert, have felt this.

"Let me keep it for a higher purpose!" (for God and creative art), Beethoven cried one day when he had repulsed the appeal of carnal passion. For a still stronger reason the impassioned of God cannot bear any division of themselves; for they know that their God will refuse to visit them in a house cumbered and soiled with desire. (Not only is the *act* called in question but the thought even more so. It is not enough to practise sexual continence if concupiscence is hidden in the secrets of the heart; for this would be impotence—

another sin—rather than freedom). The rule is inflexible for Hindu Sannyasins; and spiritual guides as different as the tender, serene, almost feminine Ramakrishna and the masculine, ardent and passionate Vivekananda, a torch of passion shaken by all winds that blow, allowed no compromise.

"Absolute continence must be practised, if God is to be realised. If a man remains absolutely continent for twelve years, he achieves superhuman power. A new nerve develops in him, called 'the nerve of intelligence.' He can remember everything and know everything. Renunciation of Kamini-Kanchana (women and gold) is essential."[1]

Poverty, chastity, the mystic marriage of St. Francis, the prescriptions of Churches and Sacred Books are superfluous; for kindred spirits of the East and the West have arrived at the same conclusions and the same results. Generally speaking the man who dedicates himself to the inner life (whether it be called Christ, Shiva, or Krishna, or the pure idea of thought and art) "must have absolute empire over his senses."[2]

But that is not enough. Those (and they are in the majority) who have to remain in contact with the world and to work in it, must exercise the same "empire" over the object of their work and the intellectual passions that feed it. They must take care not to become the slaves of any

[1] *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, II, p. 223 *et seq.*, I, p. 252 *et seq.* The question is there treated by the Master in frank and open terms without any false modesty.

[2] *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, II, p. 223.

activity, however noble, to which they may be devoted.[1]

"You cannot escape work, because nature (Prakriti) drives you to it. That being so, let all work be done as it should be done! Then if it is done without attachment it leads to God, and is a means to attain the end—and the end is God."

"Without attachment" does not imply without conscience, or zeal or love of good work, but only with disinterestedness.

"To work without attachment is to work without the hope of reward or the fear of punishment, either in this world or in any other. . . ."

But Ramakrishna was too human not to know that such an ideal is very rarely attained by frail humanity:

"To work without attachment is extremely difficult, especially in our days, and can only be realised by a chosen few. . . ."

But it is a common duty to aspire at least to such detachment, and fervent prayer and true charity are aids to it.

But stop: the word charity is an equivocal one. Charity and philanthropy are usually classed as synonyms. Ramakrishna evinced a curious mistrust of the latter, unsurpassed by any of our

[1] High disinterestedness with regard to their work has been shown by some of the most beautiful artists and proudest Christian savants of the West—even in the sceptical eighteenth century. I have admired it in men as proud as Gluck and Handel, as sensually human as Hasse and Mozart; each showed complete indifference to the fate of their work after their death, leaving it like Racine to die, in the full flood of creative power. I venture to say that no man has been able to achieve greatness unless he has attained to this height.

Western satirists such as Dickens or Mirabeau, and he unmasked with laugh or insult the hypocrisy of certain "philanthropists," although he ran the risk of shocking many good people. More than once Ramakrishna told his faithful followers to be on their guard against ostentatious philanthropy. His intuition of the secret workings of the heart led him to discover only too often in the activities and professions of charitable faith nothing but egoism, vanity, a desire for glory, or merely a barren agitation, which, without real love behind it, seeks to kill the boredom of life ; when it throws its mite to misery it is in reality trying to rid itself of its own haunting, troubled vision rather than to help the unfortunate. To the good Mallik, who spoke to him about founding hospitals and relief works, he said :

"Yes, but only on condition that you remain 'detached' (that is to say, entirely disinterested) in doing good."

He was almost carried away when he talked with worldly men, such as Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, the novelist, or with the manager of a newspaper (*The Hindu Patriot*), of so little account did he hold the intentions, the depth of soul and above all the acts of those, whose mouth is full of good works—roads and works of public utility, etc. He denied that a single real or durable good could emerge from corrupt souls. First then men must purge themselves of their egoism, and not till that has been accomplished can they work usefully for the world.

In order to elucidate Ramakrishna's attitude in this connection, I have asked many questions of

the most authoritative of his still living disciples, Swami Shivananda, and of one of those who represent his doctrine, Swami Ashokananda, and they have been at great pains to answer me. But in spite of some isolated instances, quoted above, attesting to the active philanthropy of Ramakrishna, they have not been able to prove that well-doing by words occupied any essential place in his teaching. This would be a grave charge (I say it in all loyalty), from the Western point of view, which puts deeds before intentions, and the good of others before individual salvation, if we did not remember, first, that Ramakrishna repudiated the egoism of individual salvation just as much as philanthropy without disinterested love, and, next, that his object was to light the lamp of charity in every heart.

What then is the difference between charity and self-love ?[1] Charity is the love emanating from us, not limited in its application to self, family, sect, and country. Self-love is attachment to self, family, sect, and country. Therefore a charity, which raises and leads men to God,[2] is to be cultivated.

For Ramakrishna charity meant nothing less than the love of God in all men ; for God is incarnate in man.[3] Nobody can truly love man, and

[1] " Self-love," it goes without saying, is used in its classical meaning of " love of self."

[2] *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,* I, p. 261.

[3] " You are seeking God ? Very well, look for Him in man ! The Divinity manifests Itself in man more than in any other object. In truth God is in everything ; but His power is more or less manifest in other objects. God incar-

hence nobody can help him unless he loves the God in him. And the corollary also holds good ; nobody can really know God unless he has seen Him in every man.[1]

This is what the Abbot of the Order, Shivananda, the man whose task is to represent the true spirit of Ramakrishna in these days, wrote to me[2]—lines, whose spiritual sense will be familiar to the readers of Pascal :

"You appear to conceive some distinction between the realisation of the Divinity in man and the consciousness of universal suffering with regard to motives for service. It seems to me that these are merely two aspects of the same state of mind and not two different ones. It is only by realising the Divinity inherent in man that we can truly grasp the depths of his misery ; for not till then will his condition of spiritual servitude, and his lack of perfection and divine happiness appeal to our conscience as almost tangible evidence. It is the sad feeling of contrast between the Divinity in man and his present ignorant state with all the suffering it entails, that pricks the heart to serve mankind. Without the realisation of this Divine Spirit in himself and in other true sympathy, true love, true service are impossible. That is why Sri Ramakrishna wished his disciples to attain Self-realisation. Otherwise

nate in man is the most manifest power of God in the flesh. . . . Man is the greatest manifestation of God." (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,* I, p. 350).

[1] "The attainment of perfect knowledge is to see God in every man." (*Ibid.* Vol. II).

[2] December 7, 1927.

they could not consecrate themselves profitably to the service of humanity."[1]

But meanwhile humanity is suffering, humanity is dying, abandoned. Is it to be left without help? Certainly not. For that which Ramakrishna never accomplished, which in fact he never could have accomplished within the bounds of his Karma and the limited horizon of his life (a life even then drawing to its close), he left to his greatest disciple, the heir of his word, Vivekananda—to the man, whom indeed it was his particular mission to summon from the ranks of mankind to come to mankind's rescue. To him, almost in spite of himself, he entrusted the task of working in the world and of "alleviating the misery of the humble and the poor."[2]

And Vivekananda brought a devouring passion and energy of action to it; for his was a nature cast in a very different mould from his Master's, one unable to wait a single day, a single hour before coming to the help of misery. He suffered it in his own flesh. It haunted him. It wrung

[1] And again Swami Ashokananda wrote: "Service originates from love and sympathy in the ordinary plane. But . . . . when we learn to look upon suffering humanity as only God in different forms, we find that the consciousness of the Divine in men is the motive of service, and such service becomes a potent means of God-realisation." (*Prabuddha Bharata*, February, 1928). Dare I say that it seems to me still more beautiful, still purer and higher, to love and to serve the "sufferer", *without any thought of the "Divine"*, simply because he is suffering? Forgetfulness of the Divine is perhaps nearer to the Divine than perpetual pre-occupation with It; for this does not allow of the maintenance of any trace of "attachment"—in the sense implied by Ramakrishna.

[2] The beautiful episode of 1886 will appear later, as it was told me by Swami Shivananda, an eye-witness.

from him cries of despair. He did not possess the strange serenity, wherein, during his last years, the spirit of Ramakrishna floated—that disembodied spirit that had penetrated into the redoubtable sphere of a Beyond, where good and evil were not:

"The Absolute is without attachment to the good as well as to the evil. It is like the light of a lamp. You can with its help read the Holy Scriptures, but you can equally well commit forgery by the same light. . . . Whatever the sin, the evil or the misery we find in the world, they are only misery, evil or sin in relation to us. The Absolute is above and beyond. Its sun lights the evil as well as the good.[1] I am afraid that you must accept the facts of the universe as they are. It is not given to man to penetrate clearly the ways of the Lord.[2] I see and I realise that all three are of the same substance—the victim of the sacrifice, the block and the executioner. . . . . Ah, what a vision!"[3]

Yes, the vision has a tragic grandeur akin to the Ocean. And it is good that all virile souls should plunge into it and renew their strength from time to time. It was well that at the bottom of his tender heart Ramakrishna kept its sovereign roaring and salt tang. But it is not for ordinary mortals. They run the risk of being maddened or petrified by terror. Their weakness is not fitted to achieve the synthesis of the Absolute and the ego. In order that their vital spark may not be

[1] *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,* I, pp. 61 and 87.
[2] *Ibid,* I, p. 101.
[3] *Ibid,* I, p. 437.

extinguished, "the wand of the ego imposed upon the Ocean of Satchidananda (Being, Knowledge, Happiness) must be preserved." It may be no more than "a line traced upon the water," but "if you take it away, nothing remains but the one undivided Ocean."[1] So keep it as a protection against vertigo. God Himself has allowed this semblance to support the stumbling steps of his children. They are none the less His. To those who asked Ramakrishna anxiously: "Lord, you speak to us of those who realise the Unity: 'I am He' . . . . But what of those who cannot do so, those who say: 'Thou art not me, yet I seek Thee'? What becomes of them?", he replied with a reassuring smile: "There is no difference whether you call Him 'Thou' or call Him 'I am He.' Men that realise Him through 'Thou' have a very lovely relation with Him. It is very much like that of an old trusted servant with his Master. As they both grow old, the Master leans and depends on his friend the servant, more and more. . . . The Master consults his servant regarding every serious matter that he wishes to undertake. One day. . . . the Master takes him by the hand, then seats him on his own august seat. The servant is embarrassed and says, 'What are you doing, my Lord?' But the Master holds him on the throne next to Himself saying, 'You are the same as I, my Beloved.'"[2]

Ramakrishna could always adapt his thought to the range of vision of each individual disciple; and far from destroying the fragile equilibrium of the

[1] *Ibid*, II.
[2] *Cf.* Mukerji, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

human spirit, he was careful to establish it by delicately graduating the proportion of the elements constituting it. He could be seen changing his method according to each temperament to such an extent that he sometimes seemed to hold contradictory views. He counselled energy to the angelic Yogananda, whose excessive good nature led him into error:

"A devotee ought not to be a fool."

He scolded him severely for not knowing how to defend himself. But he vehemently enjoined the violent Niranjanananda, ever ready to march against an enemy or to attack anyone who had insulted him, to cultivate a mild and forgiving spirit in face of injury. In the disciples "of the heroic type," he tolerated certain weaknesses, which he denied to the weaker ones, because the former could not be permanently affected by them. With unerring tact he knew how to calculate the force of reaction in each being.

It might have been expected that a man, who lived in constant contact with the Absolute, beyond the norms controlling the course of ordinary life, would have been incapable of understanding and guiding the thousand nuances of daily action. But the contrary was true in the case of Ramakrishna. His freedom from the chains of Illusion removed in the first instance the blinkers of all his prejudices, fanaticism and narrowness of heart and mind. And as there was no longer any impediment to his free and frank regard, he judged all things and all men with laughing good sense. One of his Socratic discussions would have surprised a hearer of to-day. They are often nearer

to Montaigne and Erasmus than to the Galilean. Their ironic turn, their gay humour have a refreshing effect. The ardent atmosphere of Bengal must have doubled their appeal to young brains, always ready to be carried away. I will here give two piquant examples of them: the parables of the Elephant and the Serpent. In the former Ramakrishna with diverting irony warned his disciples against the two opposite extremes of violence and absolute non-resistance. In the latter he seems to be treating himself ironically; he had perceived the dangers of amoralism and of indifference to action, which tend to give young heads the sunstroke of the omnipresent God, and he banteringly gauged the degree of His presence in us and our surroundings, and the hierarchy of His forms and laws.

THE ELEPHANT

"ONCE upon a time there lived in a certain forest a holy man, who had a great number of disciples. One day he taught them as follows: 'God', he said, 'is in everything. Therefore we ought to bow our heads in adoration before every single object in the world.' It happened that one of his disciples had gone to collect wood for the sacrificial fire. Suddenly he heard a shout: 'Scatter! Scatter! A mad elephant is coming!' Immediately they all fled, except he, who reasoned thus: 'The elephant is God in one form; why then should I run away?' So he stayed where he was, he bowed to the elephant as the Lord, and began to sing his praises. The elephant-driver yelled: 'Save yourself! Save yourself! . . .' But the disciple would not move a single step. The

elephant seized him in its trunk and flung him a great distance. The unfortunate man remained motionless, stunned, bruised and bleeding. When his master heard what had happened, he ran to his assistance with the others. They carried him into the house and cared for his wounds. When he recovered consciousness they asked him: 'Why did you not save yourself when you heard the elephant-driver shout?' The young man replied: 'Our Master had just taught us that God reveals Himself in every living creature. I thought of the elephant as God, and so I did not want to leave the place.' Then the Guru said to him: 'My son, it was true that it was an elephant God, who appeared. But did not the elephant-driver God tell you to seek shelter? It is quite true that God reveals Himself in all things, but if He is manifest in the elephant, is He not just as much manifest in the elephant-driver—if not more? Tell me then why you paid no attention to his warning. . . .'"[1]

And here is the substance of a mischievous conversation of the Master with the youthful Vivekananda:

THE SERPENT

MASTER (*smiling*): "What think you, Narendra?[2] People who live in the world often express themselves very bitterly with regard to those who live in God. When an elephant goes his way along the high road, a crowd of curs and other animals always run after him, yapping and snap-

[1] *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, I, p. 56.

[2] I would remind the reader that Narendra or Naren was the real name of Vivekananda.

ping at his heels. But he takes no notice and proceeds along his own undeviating way. Suppose, my child, people speak evil of you behind your back, what would you do?"

NARENDRA (*scornfully*): "I should regard them as the curs in the street barking at my heels."

MASTER (*laughing*): "No, my child, you must never go as far as that! Remember that God dwells in all things animate and inanimate. So all things deserve our respect. . . . The only thing that we can do in our intercourse with men, is to take care that we consort with the good and avoid the society of the wicked. It is true that God is even in the tiger. But it does not follow that we ought to put our arms round his neck and press him to our heart!" (*The disciples laughed*).

NARENDRA: "Must one then remain quiet, if rogues insult one?"

MASTER: "Once upon a time there was a field wherein herd boys watched over their cattle. In the same field lived a terrible and poisonous serpent. One day a holy man happened to pass by. The children ran to him and cried: 'Holy man, do not go that way. Beware of the serpent!' 'My children,' said the holy man, 'I am not afraid of your serpent. I know the Mantras which will keep me safe from all harm.' So saying, he continued his way. . . . The serpent saw him and came towards him raising his hood. The holy man murmured a charm, and the serpent fell at his feet as powerless as an earthworm. 'Well,' said the holy man, 'why do you behave thus, doing evil to others? I am going to give you a Sacred Name (that of God) to repeat, and

you will learn to love God; in the end you will see Him; and the desire to do evil will leave you.' He whispered the Sacred Name in the serpent's ear. The serpent bowed and said: 'O Master, what must I do to be saved?' 'Repeat the Sacred Name,' said the holy man, 'and do no ill to any living creature! I shall come again to see how you have been behaving.' And so saying, the holy man departed. . . . . Days went by. The little herd boys noticed that the serpent did not bite. They threw stones at it. It remained as quiet and inoffensive as an earthworm. One of the wretches took it by the tail, waved it round his head and then threw it against the stones several times. The serpent vomited blood and was left for dead. During the night he came to himself; slowly, slowly he dragged himself to his hole; his body was broken in pieces. After several days he was nothing but a skeleton, it took him so much time before he could drag himself out to look for food. For fear of the children he only went out at night. From the time of his initiation by the Brahmin he had stopped doing evil to any creature. As well as he could, he tried to live on leaves and other wisps. The holy man returned. He looked everywhere in order to find the serpent. The children told him that he was dead. The Brahmin was astonished; he knew that the name of the Lord, which the serpent repeated, had the spiritual power to make death impossible before the problem of life had been solved, that is to say, before God had been seen. He recommenced his search, and called the serpent several times by name. The serpent came out

of his hole, and bowed to his teacher. The following dialogue took place:

"HOLY MAN: 'Well, how are you?'

"SERPENT: 'Thank you, Master. By the grace of God I am very well.'

"HOLY MAN: 'How is it, then, that you are nothing but skin and bone? What has happened to you?'

"SERPENT: 'O Master, in obedience to your command I tried not to harm any living creature. I have been living on leaves and other scraps. And so it is possible that I have grown thinner.'

"HOLY MAN: 'I fear that it is not simply a change of diet that has brought you to this state. There must have been something else. Tell me!'

"SERPENT: 'Ah! . . . . perhaps, ... yes, ... I can see what it was without a doubt. One day the little herd boys treated me rather badly. They took me by the tail, and banged me against the stones several times very hard. Poor children! They had no idea of the change that had taken place in me. How were they to know that I would not bite anyone?'

"HOLY MAN: 'But what madness! What madness! You must be an idiot not to know to stop your enemies from ill-treating you thus! . . . . What I forbade you to do was to bite any of God's creatures. But why did you not *hiss* at those who wanted to kill you, so as to frighten them?' . . ."

And Ramakrishna looked at his disciples with a twinkle in his eye:

"So raise your hood. . . . But do not bite! . . . . A man living in society, particularly if he

is a citizen and the father of a family, ought to *pretend* to resist evil in order to defend himself. But he must at the same time be very careful not to return evil for evil."

I will not vouch for the practical and moral excellence of this last recipe, which savours rather of *"Si vis pacem, para bellum!"* a fallacy this generation has been obliged to expose, to its cost. But I will preserve the mocking smile of this spiritual story-teller, so reminiscent of La Fontaine.[1] We must necessarily also consider Ramakrishna's method as at bottom a means to re-establish equilibrium in the ship of action, swinging perilously and driven by opposing winds from one bank to another, by interposing a common-sense view between the two extremes.

It is obvious that he practised and professed "Ahimsa" (hurt nothing) quite as much as Gandhi. He specifically proclaimed it, not only with regard to man but all living creatures.[2]

But he was more of a humorist and more versatile than Gandhi, never anxious to lay down one

[1] The famous French fable-writer of the seventeenth century.

[2] Here is another sheaf of beautiful stories :

First this admirable parable : "God in Everything" (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, II, p. 129) :

"Once upon a time there was a monastery, whose inmates went out every day to beg. One day a monk, having issued forth to seek food, found a Zemindar beating a poor man very severely. . . . He interfered. . . . The Zemindar in a furious rage turned his anger against the monk and beat him until he lost consciousness. The other monks, warned of what had happened, came running up ; they found him lying on the ground, carried him gently to the Math (Monastery) and laid him upon his bed. Sitting round him sadly they fanned him, and one gently poured a little milk into his mouth. After a time he came to himself, opened his eyes and looked around.

definite rule, but weighing in one glance the pros and cons of a question. The result was that this passionate lover of the Absolute possessed in the world of Maya a very fine sense of the golden mean, and although, like the Mother, he flung up kite souls into the vault of heaven, he always brought them back to earth by the string of common sense, if the hour had not yet come for them to fly away.

him. One of them, anxious to know if he recognised his brethren, cried in his ear: 'Brother, who poured the milk into your mouth?' The monk replied in a faint voice: 'Brother, He who beat me, He Himself poured the milk into my mouth. . . .'"

And this anecdote (*Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 620):

"Young Kali used to go fishing. The Master asked him: 'Why are you so cruel?' Kali replied: 'I am not doing anything wrong. We are all Atman and Atman is immortal, so I do not really kill the fishes.' The Master said to him: 'My dear child, you deceive yourself. A man of realisation (that is to say, one who realises the Divinity in himself) can never be cruel to others. It is a physical impossibility. He could not even think of it. . . .'"

(*Cf. Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 417; *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, II, p. 204.—Ramakrishna himself reached such a point that he was unwilling to pick the flowers for the offerings of worship.)

Finally, this moving scene was enacted, as has been recorded by Swami Saradananda:

"One day (in 1884) Ramakrishna was talking to his disciples. He was explaining to them the essential principles of the Vaishnavite religion, of which one is 'Kindness to all creatures.' 'This universe belongs to Krishna. Know this in the depth of your being, and be kind to all creatures.' 'Kind to all creatures' he repeated and passed into Samadhi (ecstasy). Coming to himself, he murmured: 'Kind to all creatures. . . . Kind? . . . Are you not ashamed, insignificant insect? How can you show pity to God's creatures? Who are you to show mercy? . . . No! No! Mercy is impossible. Serve them as if they were Shiva! . . . .'

"Thereupon Naren (Vivekananda), as he went out with the others, expounded to them the deep meaning of these words, which they had only half understood. He interpreted them

He made them remain in the world so that they might teach it; but first they had to be taught themselves—they had to gain an exact knowledge of their own nature, and the natures of others round them and the Divine Essence permeating them all. Most of them only attained it by laborious, gradual and constant progress; for this knowledge had to be won by their own efforts, although doubtless they could call upon the paternal help of the Guru; but the will of the Guru was never substituted for their own; he was only there to help them to find their bearings. With a few exceptions he refused to interfere[1] in

in the light of the doctrine of Service, which reconciled the high love of God with beneficent activity."

[1] In general, but not always, he refused to do so. (Further on you will read of his conquest of Vivekananda; but then, the possession of that royal prey was vital; moreover, Vivekananda was of a stature to defend himself, as will be seen). But even when Ramakrishna wished to leave his disciples their freedom, was he always able to do so? He possessed curious and formidable powers of Yoga. He used them as little as possible, for he detested occult methods, and was absolutely opposed to "miracles"; he did not think that they were impossible, but that they were useless and even harmful. He showed the same repugnance to them as Christ. So-called supernatural powers seemed to him a hindrance in the path of spiritual perfection, which ought to be the natural fruit of the heart. But was he always sufficiently master of such powers not to use them?—Tulasi (Nirmalananda) had not yet met him and was waiting on a verandah; he saw a man pass by absorbed, with uncertain gait. This man (it was Ramakrishna) gave him one glance without stopping. Tulasi felt a sort of creeping sensation within his bosom and remained paralysed for a moment.—Tarak (Shivananda) was facing Ramakrishna, motionless and silent; the Master's look fell upon him; Tarak dissolved in tears and trembled throughout his members.—At his first visit Kaliprasad (Abhedananda) touched Ramakrishna, and was immediately flooded with a wave of energy.

At other times the Master seemed deliberately to provoke

order to modify their will during the first stages, when they were the builders of their own development. He merely nourished them with his inner sun, and so increased their energy tenfold. In

the awakening of inner forces. He would help the disciples when he saw the efforts they were making of their own free will. So, when he saw Latu (Adbhutananda) exhausting himself by great devotion, he prayed the Mother to grant him the fruit of his pious desire; and several days afterwards, Latu passed into ecstasy during his meditation.—When Subodh (Subodhananda) visited him for the second time, he touched his breast, saying: "Awake, Mother, Awake!", and wrote with his finger on his tongue; Subodh felt a torrent of light rising from his inner self to his brain; the forms of gods and goddesses passed like lightning and faded into the infinite; he lost all senses of personal identity, but was recalled almost at once by Ramakrishna, who was himself surprised at the violence of his reaction.—Little Gangadhar (Akhandananda) was led into the temple of Kali by the Master, who said to him: "Behold the living Shiva!" And Gangadhar saw Him.

But the reader must beware lest he labour under a misapprehension. The Master never tried to impose on the disciples visions or thoughts which were not already there; he sought rather to awaken them. To intellectual natures he was the first to advise against research for visual realisations. When Baburam (Premananda), whom he loved, begged him to procure ecstasy for him, the Divine Mother warned Ramakrishna that Baburam was destined to have Jnana (Knowledge) and not Bhava (emotional absorption in God).—He asked the boy, who was to be one of his greatest intellectual disciples, Saratchandra (Saradananda): "How would you like to realise God? What visions do you have when you meditate?" Saratchandra replied: "I do not care for visions. I do not imagine any particular form of God when I meditate. I imagine Him manifested in all creatures upon earth." Ramakrishna smiled and said: "But that is the last word in spirituality. *You cannot attain to it at first.*" Saratchandra replied: "I cannot be content with less."

Even in the case of the most sensitive, visual realisation was only a stage through which to pass. Abhedananda, after having seen gods and goddesses in meditation, one day saw all the forms blending into one luminous image. Ramakrishna told him that for the future he would have no more visions;

general it was during the last stage of their upward ascent, when they had manfully attained the bliss of the stage at the top of the slope by their own independent efforts. Then the Master often agreed to bestow the final shock of Illumination. A little thing was sufficient, a word, a look, a touch, like the lightning of Grace, which never fell except into prepared souls on heights already attained. No new knowledge was revealed,[1] but

he had passed that stage. And in fact from that day Abhedananda had nothing but the consciousness of the infinite and of immensity, finally reaching the impersonal Brahman.—When Sri Ramakrishna heard another persuading Baburam to obtain special powers from the Master, Ramakrishna called Baburam to his side and said reproachfully: "What more can you ask me for? Is not all that I have yours? All that I have won in the way of realisation is for you. Here is the key, open and take everything."

But he added to the Vedantist, Harinath (Turiyananda): "If you think you can find God better away from me, then go! My one desire is that you should raise yourselves above the misery of the world and enjoy divine beatitude."

And so in a thousand ways he used all his influence to direct these young souls in their true religious sense, so that they might develop their own true and highest individuality. He never dreamt of annexing them. He gave himself to them. He never said to them, and never thought: "You ought to give yourselves to me." Herein lies one of the main differences between his guidance and that of Christ.

(For the above *Cf. Life of Sri Ramakrishna,* pp. 475, 488, 600, 604, 606, 615, etc.)

I have thought it necessary to emphasise for the Western reader this curious aspect of personal action exercised by Ramakrishna over those round him, without giving it the importance it obtains in the East. I hold the same opinion as Saratchandra (Saradananda) in this connection: "We must have more. We cannot be satisfied with less." That which the eyes could see counted for little compared to the evidence manifested to the spirit.

[1] Disciples who have passed through these experiences—and several of the most intellectual are still alive—attest that there was not the slightest suggestion of hypnotic power, which

everything that they had known before, all the store of knowledge that they had slowly amassed, became in a flash tangible life and living reality. "At that point you realise that all things live, like your own self, in God. You become the will-power and the conscience of all that is. Your will becomes that of the whole universe. . . ."[1]

This realisation was the last stage, for beyond this temporary revelation lay the supreme realisation, the absolute Identity, obtained in the Nirvikalpa Samadhi (the Highest Ecstasy). But that was reserved for men, who had achieved their mission in life ; it was the ultimate and forbidden

violates the will by imposing conditions upon it from an alien consciousness. It was rather of the nature of a tonic, a stimulant. Under its impulsion men obtained a clearer vision of their own ideals. The present Abbot of the Order, Swami Shivananda, wrote to me :

" Ramakrishna had the power to raise others to the greatest heights of consciousness by transmitting to them the energy of his own spirituality. He did it either by the power of his thought or by his touch. Many of us had the privilege of being taken to higher planes of spiritual consciousness according to our capacity. It was neither hypnotism, nor a condition of deep sleep. I myself had the privilege of attaining this high spiritual consciousness three times through his touch and by his will. I still live to bear direct witness to his tremendous spiritual power."

Let the learned men of Europe, who are preoccupied by the problems of mystic psycho-analysis, put themselves in touch with these living witnesses while there is yet time. I myself, I repeat, have little curiosity about such phenomena, whose subjective reality is not in doubt, and I believe it my duty to describe them ; for they are hedged about by all possible guarantees of good faith and analytical intelligence. I am more interested in the fact of great religious intuition, in that which *continues to be* rather than in that which *has been*, in that which is or which can be always in all beings rather than in that which is the privilege of a few.

[1] It is to be understood that this means that we espouse the will of the universe, and not that we impose our will upon it.

joy ; for from it there is no return except in a few exceptional cases like that of Ramakrishna himself. In spite of the prayers of his disciples, he was loth to let them taste of it ; they had not yet won the right. He knew only too well that such "salt dolls" would no sooner touch the first waves of that Ocean than they would be absorbed in it. He who is desirous of attaining Identity with Unique Reality only receives a return ticket by a miracle.

The disciples therefore had to remain in this world at the stage before the final, wherein indentification with all reality takes place.[1] Properly speaking it is the stage of Illumination, to which we can all aspire and to which we have the power to attain by ourselves and to guide others to a similar attainment.

And what do we, the free spirits of the West, who have realised the unity of living beings through reason or love, do that is different from this ? Is it not the constant aim of our own efforts, the passion inspiring us, the profound faith whereby we live and are carried over the bloody waters of hatred between men without soiling so much as the soles of our feet ? Is it not the one object of our desire and our profound conviction that sooner or later it will come to pass—the unity of all nations, races and religions ? And are we not in this, although ignorant of it, the disciples of Ramakrishna ?

[1] "The world is the field of action where man is put to work just as men come from their country houses to business in Calcutta." (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, II, p. 147).

(Swami Vivekananda realised Nirvikalpa Samadhi even during the life-time of the Master. And it cannot be said that some of the other disciples did not.—*Publisher*).

X

NAREN, THE BELOVED DISCIPLE

But among the Indian disciples of the Upper Room, all of whom, as I shall show, later distinguished themselves by faith and works, there was one exceptional disciple, whom Ramakrishna treated in an exceptional way. He had chosen him at the very first glance before the young man so much as knew him, on account of what he was and what he might become—a spiritual leader of humanity: Narendranath Dutt, Vivekananda.

The Paramahamsa with his intuitive genius for souls, for whom time was not, and who could discern in the twinkling of an eye the whole flood of the future, believed that he had seen the great disciple in the womb of the elect before he met him in the flesh.

I will give here an account of his beautiful vision. Doubtless I could try to explain it by ordinary methods as well as any of our psychologists, but such explanation is immaterial. We know that a mighty vision creates and produces that which it has seen. In a deeper sense the prophets of the hereafter have been the real creators of what was not yet, but which was trembling on the verge of being. The torrent forming the remarkable destiny of Vivekananda would have been lost in the bowels of the earth, if Ramakrishna's glance had not, as with one blow of an axe, split the rock barring its way, so that through

the breach thus made the river of his soul could flow.

"One day I found that my mind was soaring high in Samadhi along a luminous path. It soon transcended the stellar universe and entered the subtler region of ideas. As it ascended higher and higher, I found on both sides of the way ideal forms of gods and goddesses. The mind then reached the outer limits of that region, where a luminous barrier separated the sphere of relative existence from that of the Absolute. Crossing that barrier, the mind entered the transcendental realm, where no corporeal being was visible. Even the gods dared not peep into that sublime realm, and were content to keep their seats far below. But the next moment I saw seven venerable sages seated there in Samadhi. It occurred to me that these sages must have surpassed not only men but even the gods in knowledge and holiness, in renunciation and love. Lost in admiration, I was reflecting on their greatness, when I saw a portion of that undifferentiated luminous region condense into the form of a divine child. The child came to one of the sages, tenderly clasped his neck with his lovely arms, and addressing him in a sweet voice, tried to drag his mind down from the state of Samadhi. That magic touch roused the sage from the superconscious state, and he fixed his half-open eyes upon the wonderful child. His beaming countenance showed that the child must have been the treasure of his heart. In great joy the strange child spoke to him: 'I am going down. You too must go with me. The sage remained mute but his

tender look expressed his assent. As he kept gazing at the child, he was again immersed in Samadhi. I was surprised to find that a fragment of his body and mind was descending to earth in the form of a bright light. No sooner had I seen Narendra than I recognised him to be that sage."[1]

The seer does not say who was the child, but we can guess. Indeed he himself avowed to the disciples[2] that it was he. Certainly he remained throughout his life the Bambino,[3] whose lips drank the milk of the Mother, and who only left Our Lady's arms for an instant, in order to fulfil his destiny—the destiny, according to his own definition, of sending into the world a man better fitted than himself to guide mankind and to take over the command of the army.

His judgment was a sound one. He needed a strong body, arms to turn over the earth, legs to journey over it, a bodyguard of workers and the head to command them, in addition to his great heart charged with love for the whole world. That his burning faith made realisation spring from the soil not only proves his foresight and the strength of his desire, but that the soil of Bengal was prepared and feverishly awaiting his call. Vivekananda was projected into the "century" by the child-birth of Nature herself; for the time of parturition had arrived for that form of spirit.

Ramakrishna is also to be commended for

[1] *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 438.

[2] Saradananda.

[3] "Bambino" is the name given in the pictures of the Italian Renaissance to the infant Christ in the arms of the Madonna.

seeing at once in this wayward, tormented and storm-tossed adolescent, as Narendra then was, the future leader, exactly the Evangelist he was expecting.

The story of their early meetings deserves to be told in its entirety. The reader will then feel the same attraction that Naren in spite of himself experienced, and which, in spite of himself, united him to the Master who had chosen him.

But let us first draw the portrait of this young genius at the moment when his meteor entered and was absorbed in the orbit of Ramakrishna.[1]

He was a member of a great aristocratic Kshatriya family; and his whole life showed the stamp of that warrior caste. He was born on January 12, 1863, at Calcutta. His mother was a highly educated woman of regal majesty, whose heroic spirit had been nurtured on the great Hindu epics.[2] His father, who led an ostentatious and restless life, showed an independence of spirit almost Voltairean in quality, akin to that of a great French

[1] In this account I am following the great biography, *The Life of the Swami Vivekananda* by his Eastern and Western disciples, Advaita Ashrama, Himalayas, 4 Vols.

To it I have added some precious details furnished by Saradananda in his biography of Ramakrishna, and by the noble American disciple of Vivekananda, Sister Christine, whose unpublished Memoirs were kindly lent to me.

[2] The influence of this woman over her son, Vivekananda, must never be forgotten. He was a difficult child to bring up and gave her much trouble, but until the day of his death he kept a tender regard for her. In America at the end of 1894 he rendered her public homage; in his lectures in praise of Indian womanhood he often spoke of her, extolling her self-mastery, her piety, her high character. "It is my mother," he said, "who has been the constant inspiration of my life and work."

Seigneur of the eighteenth century, and an indifference to caste, due at once to his large sentiment of humanity and to the smiling consciousness of his own superiority. But the grandfather, a rich and cultured man, had abandoned wife and children, a high position, fortune and society at the age of twenty-five to retire into "the forest" and become a Sannyasin; and from that day had never been seen. . . .

His childhood and boyhood were those of a young artist Prince of the Renaissance.[1] He was gifted with a multiplicity of talents, and cultivated them all. He had a leonine beauty and the lithe grave of a fawn. The possessor of physical courage and the build of an athlete, he was a past master in all physical exercises. He could box, swim, row and had a passion for horses. He was the favourite of youth and the arbiter of fashion. He danced the great religious dances with consummate art, and had a delightful voice, which

From Sister Christine's unpublished Memoirs, we learn some characteristic details of his two parents, which she gleaned in the course of private conversations with Vivekananda in America.

From his mother, his proud little mother, he inherited his royal bearing and many of his intellectual faculties, his extraordinary memory, and moral purity.

To his father he owed his intelligence, his artistic sense, his compassion. This noble Indian, who belonged to the generation flooded by the tide of Western positivism, had lost his faith. He treated it as if it were all superstition. He admired the poetry of Hafiz and the Bible as works of art. He said a curious thing to his son, when he showed him the two Christian Testaments: "If there is a religion, it would be in this book." But he did not believe in the soul or in a future life. He was generous to the point of prodigality, and seemed to be given over to a smiling and worldly scepticism.

[1] That is to say, of the Italian Renaissance.

later was to charm the ear of Ramakrishna. He studied vocal and instrumental music for four or five years under famous Hindu and Mussulman professors. He wrote tunes and published a documented Essay on the science and philosophy of Indian music. Indeed he was everywhere regarded as a musical authority. For him music was always the gate of the temple,[1] the vestibule of the palace of the Most High. At college he was distinguished for his brilliant intellect, embracing with equal zest the sciences, astronomy, mathematics, philosophy, and Indian and Western languages. He read the English and Sanskrit poets. He devoured the historical works of Green and Gibbon. He was fired by the French Revolution and Napoleon. From his childhood up he practised, like so many Indian children, the habit of meditation. At night he used to pore over *The Imitation of Jesus Christ* and the Vedanta. He loved philosophic discussions. It was this mania for argument, criticism, "discrimination," that later won for him the name of Vivekananda. He tried to weld Hellenic beauty and Indo-Germanic thought into one harmonious whole. But to his universalism, which attained the standards of Leonardo and Alberti with its spiritual empire over life in all forms, was added the crown of a religious soul and absolute purity. This beautiful ephebe, to whom all the good things of life and its pleasures were offered, though free and passionate, imposed upon himself a rigorous chastity. Without being tied to any sect, before he had adopted any

[1] The temple of the Goddess Sarasvati, the patron of the arts.

Credo, he had already the feeling, the profound reason for which I shall show later, that purity of body and soul is a spiritual force, whose fire penetrates into every aspect of life, but is extinguished by the slightest defilement. Moreover, he was overshadowed by a great destiny, and though he was as yet unaware of its direction, he wished to be worthy of it and to realise it.

The result of such a multiplicity of gifts and contending passions made him live for many years in great turmoil of soul before his personality became fixed. Between the ages of seventeen and twenty-one (from 1880 to the end of 1884) he went through a series of intellectual crises increasing in intensity until religious certainty finally put an end to them.

He was first moved by reading Stuart Mill's *Essays on Religion,* which caused his optimistic surface theism, gleaned in fashionable Brahmo Samajist circles, to crumble away. The face of Evil in nature appeared to him, and he revolted against it. But he was powerless to prevent the intrusion of bored disillusion and antique melancholy[1] (in the sense of Albrecht Durer). In vain he tried to adopt the theories of Herbert Spencer, with whom he corresponded.[2] He asked the older

[1] A reference to the famous engraving of Albrecht Durer, Melancholy, representing a desponding archangel, sitting in the midst of the chaos of science. The sense of melancholy is above the ordinary and signifies a soul, saddened and wearied by its vain intellectual researches.

[2] Spencer was astonished, so it is said, by his daring criticisms, and admired the precociousness of his philosophic intellect. According to Saradananda, Naren pursued the study of Western philosophy between his first examination in 1881 and that of 1884 corresponding to our licentiate's degree. He

students in his college classes for counsel, in particular Brajendra Nath Seal.[1] To him he confided his scepticism and begged him to guide him in his search for the truth. It was to Seal that he owed his reading of Shelley and that he bathed his burning soul in the aerial waves of the poet's pantheism.[2] His young mentor then wished to enroll him in the service of the God of Reason—the Parabrahman—a conception particularly his own. Brajendra's rationalism was of a peculiar kind in that it claimed to be an amalgamation of the pure monism of the Vedanta, the Hegelian dialectic of the Absolute Idea, and the gospel of the French Revolution: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. He believed that the principle of individualism was "the evil" and Universal Reason "the good." It was then essential that pure reason should be manifested; this was the great modern problem, and Brajendra thought to solve

had then read Descartes, Hume, Kant, Fichte, Spinoza, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Auguste Comte, and Darwin. But it seems to me that he can only have read them superficially from general treatises and that he did not study their actual works. He also followed a course of medicine, studying the physiology of the brain and nervous system. "The analytic and scientific method of the West had conquered him, and he wished to apply it to the study of Hindu religious ideas." (Saradananda).

[1] This great intellect, at present the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Mysore and one of the most solid and erudite philosophers in India, has related his reminiscences of the young Vivekananda in an article written for *Prabuddha Bharata* of 1907, and reproduced in *The Life of the Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. I, pp. 172-7. Although at college he was in the class above Vivekananda, the latter was a little his senior.

[2] He also read Wordsworth, of all English poets the one who seems most akin to the poets of the Far East.

it by Revolution. His revolutionary and imperial rationalism appealed to some sides of Narendra's domineering nature. But the latter's tumultuous personality was not to be confined within such limits. Although his intellect certainly wished to accept (or impose) the sovereignty of universal reason and to make the foundation of morality an imperious negation of individualism, his life would not agree. He was too intoxicated with the beauty of the world and its passions. An attempt to deprive him of it was like condemning a young beast of prey to vegetarianism. His melancholy and anguish redoubled. It was mockery to offer him a diet of immanent Reason, a bloodless God! Being a real Hindu for whom life is the first attribute, if not the very essence of Truth, he needed the living revelation, the realisation of the Absolute, God made man—some holy Guru, who could say to him: "I have seen Him. I have touched Him. I have been He." Nevertheless, his intellect, nurtured as it had been in European thought and the critical spirit inherited from his father, revolted against this aspiration of his heart and senses, as will be seen in his first reactions against Ramakrishna.

He was, like all young Bengal intellectuals of his time, drawn by the pure light of Keshab Chunder Sen. It was then at its height and Naren envied it: he could have wished to be Keshab. He was naturally in sympathy with his new order, and joined it. His name was enrolled on the list of members of the new Brahmo Samaj.[1] The

[1] His name remained on the list a long time after he had become the Swami Vivekananda, and he told his disciples that

Ramakrishna Mission has since maintained that he could not have been entirely in accord with the spirit of categorical reform held by this Samaj, which ran counter to even the most respectable prejudices of orthodox Hinduism. But I am inclined to disagree with them. The reckless character of young Naren would have delighted in wholesale destruction, and he was not the man to reproach his new companions for iconoclasm. It was only later, and in great part owing to Ramakrishna's influence, that he came to conceive of and profess respect for even antiquated beliefs and customs, provided they were in accordance with long tradition and deeply assimilated into the substance of the nation.[1] But I am convinced that this did not come to pass without a struggle ; and it is partly this, which explains his first recoil of intellectual mistrust from Ramakrishna. For the time being, however, he had joined the movement of young Brahmos in Bengal for the education and unity of the Indian masses without distinction of caste, race or religion. Some of them attacked orthodox Hinduism even more bitterly than did the Christian missionaries ; but it was fatal that Naren's free and living intelligence should have quickly realised the unintelligent narrowness of such critics, who were not free from cross-gained fanaticism, and that his spirit no less than his

he had never withdrawn it. When he was asked in later years : "Do you attack the Brahmo Samaj ?" he answered : "Not at all." He considered this society to be a high form of Hinduism. (*Cf. The Life of the Swami Vivekananda,* Vol. I, Chapter 38, devoted to the Brahmo Samaj).

[1] In the maturity of his powers he often insisted on this point, that his own Message was not a negation but fulfilment

national pride should have been wounded by them. He would not subscribe to the abdication of Indian wisdom before the badly assimilated knowledge of the West.* Nevertheless he continued to attend the meetings of the Brahmo Samaj, but in his heart he was not at rest.

He next imposed upon himself the life of an ascetic, living in a dark, damp room, lying on the ground upon a quilt with books everywhere, making tea on the floor, reading and meditating day and night. He suffered excruciating and stabbing pains in his head, but he did not achieve the reconciliation of the conflicting passions of his nature, whose struggles lasted even into his troubled sleep.

"From my youth up," he relates, "every night just as I fell asleep two dreams took shape. In one I saw myself among the great ones of the earth, the possessor of riches, honours, power, and glory; and I felt that the capacity to attain all these was in me. But the next instant I saw myself renouncing all worldly things, dressed in a simple loin-cloth, living on alms, sleeping at the foot of a tree; and I thought that I was capable also of living thus, like the Rishis of old. Of these two pictures the second took the upper hand and

of true Hindu thought. He was a partisan of radical reforms, but he held that they should be carried out by conservative methods. (*Ibid*).

These are practically the very words of Keshab: "To preach Hindu conservatism in a liberal spirit." (*Indian Empire*, 1884).

* This shows that Naren was not entirely in agreement with the spirit of categorical reform maintained by the Brahmo Samaj.—*Publisher.*

I felt that only thus could a man attain supreme bliss. . . . . And I fell asleep in the foretaste of that bliss. . . . . And each night it was renewed. . . ."[1]

Such was he at the moment when he went to meet the Master, who was to govern the rest of his life. In the great city where India and Europe meet, he had made the round of the great religious individualities ;[2] but he had returned unsatisfied. He sought in vain, tasted, rejected. He wandered. . . .

*

He was eighteen and preparing for his first University Examination. In November 1880 in the house of a friend, Surendranath Mitra, a rich publican converted to the Indian Christ, during a small festivity at which Naren had sung a beautiful religious hymn, the "falcon's eyes" of Ramakrishna for the first time pierced to the depths of his unsatisfied soul, and fixed his choice upon it.[3] He asked Naren to come to see him at Dakshineswar.

The young man arrived with a band of thoughtless and frivolous friends. He came in and sat down, heedless of his surroundings, without seeming to see or hear anything, wrapt in his own thoughts. Ramakrishna, who was watching him,

[1] Extracts from the last volume of the Biography of Ramakrishna (*Divya Bhava*) by Saradananda, Chapter III.

[2] It is said that his last attempt had been with Devendranath Tagore, who recognised his great gifts.

[3] Ramakrishna said later : "I saw no attention to the body, no vanity, no attachment to outward things in him. And his eyes !. . . It seemed that some power possessed the interior of his soul . . . . And I thought : 'How is it possible that such a man can live in Calcutta ?' . . ."

asked him to sing. Naren obeyed, and his song had such a pathetic tone that the Master, like Naren, a passionate lover of music, passed into an ecstasy. Here I will leave Naren to speak for himself:

"After I had sung he suddenly got up, and taking me by the hand, led me onto the north verandah, and closed the door behind us. We were alone. Nobody could see us. . . . . To my great surprise he began to weep for joy. He held me by the hand and addressed me very tenderly, as if I were somebody he had known familiarly for a long time. He said: 'Ah! you have come so late. Why have you been so unkind as to make me wait so long? My ears are tired of hearing the futile words of other men. Oh! how I have longed to pour out my spirit into the breast of somebody fitted to receive my inner experiences! . . . .' He continued thus sobbing the while. Then standing before me with folded hands he said: 'Lord, I know that you are the ancient sage Nara, the incarnation of Narayana, reborn on the earth, to take away the misery of humanity.'[1] I was amazed. 'What have I come to see?' I thought. 'He ought to be put in a strait jacket! Why, I am the son of Viswanath Dutt. How dare he speak thus to me? . . . . .' But I remained outwardly unmoved and let him talk. He took my hand again and said: 'Promise me that you will come to see me again alone, and soon!'. . . ."

[1] So in the first words of his delirium he settled for Vivekananda the duty of social service, to which he was to devote his life, and which distinguishes him from all the other "seers" of India.

Naren promised in order to free himself from his strange host, but he vowed within himself never to return. They went back to the common drawing-room, where they found the others. Naren sat down apart and watched the personage. He could not find anything strange in his ways or in his words ; nothing but an inner logic, which he felt was the fruit of a profound life of absolute renunciation and a striking sincerity. He heard him say (and these words were an answer to his own nocturnal strivings) :

"God can be realised. One can see Him and speak to Him as I speak to and see you. But who takes the trouble to do so ? People will shed tears for a wife, children or possessions. But who weeps for the love of God ? Yet if a man weeps sincerely for Him, He will manifest Himself to him."[1]

And to the speaker himself it was obvious that these were no ideal words, but that he had proved their truth. Naren could not reconcile the picture before his eyes of this simple and serene sage with the amazing scene he had just witnessed. He said to himself : "He is a monomaniac, but he is not

[1] Another account given by Vivekananda in his Lecture, *My Master*, (*Cf.* also *The Life of the Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. I, p. 212) says that it was he himself who directly addressed Ramakrishna and asked him the eternal question, that he had been taking feverishly round from sage to sage : "Sir, have you seen God ?" and that Ramakrishna replied : "Yes, my son, I have seen God. I do see Him, just as I see you before me. Only I see the Lord in a much more intense sense, and I can show Him to you."

It is probable that this dialogue took place at a later date, after Vivekananda had become familiar with Ramakrishna.

without greatness. He may be mad, but he is worthy of respect." He left Dakshineswar in much confusion of thought, and if he had been asked at the moment what were to be his relations with Ramakrishna, he would doubtless have replied that they would remain as they were.

But the strange vision "worked" upon him.

A month later he returned on foot to Dakshineswar.

"I found him alone sitting on his small bed. He was glad to see me, and called me affectionately to sit near him on one side of the bed. But a moment later I saw him convulsed with some emotion. His eyes were fixed upon me, he muttered under his breath, and drew slowly nearer. I thought he was going to make some eccentric remark as on the previous occasion. But before I could stop him, he had placed his right foot on my body. The contact was terrible. With my eyes open I saw the walls and everything in the room whirling and vanishing into nothingness. . . . . The whole universe and my own individuality were at the same time almost lost in a nameless void, which swallowed up everything that is. I was terrified, and believed I was face to face with death. I could not stop myself from crying out: 'What are you doing? I have parents at home. . . . .' Then he began to laugh, and passing his hand over my breast, he said: 'All right. Let us leave it at that for the moment! It will come, all in good time.' He had no sooner said these words than the strange phenomena disappeared. I came to myself again, and everything both outside and in, was as before."

I have written down this astonishing account without indulging in futile comment. Whatever the Western reader may think, he cannot help being struck by the power of hallucination in these Indian souls, recalling that of Shakespeare's passionate visionaries. It may, however, be noted in passing that the visionary in this case was anything but a week, credulous and uncritical spirit. He revolted against his own vision. His strong personality, scenting danger, was violently antipathetic to all hypnotic action ; and he asked himself at first if he had not been the victim of some kind of mesmerism. But he had no symptoms of it. Still trembling from the tornado that had swept over him, he remained on his guard. But after this one great shock the rest of the visit was quite normal. Ramakrishna treated his visitor with simple and familiar kindness as if nothing had happened.

At his third visit, probably a week later, Naren was on the defensive with all his critical faculties on the alert. Sri Ramakrishna that day took him to an adjacent garden. After strolling for some time they took their seats in the parlour. Soon the Master fell into a trance and as Narendra watched, he was suddenly touched by him. Narendra immediately lost all outward consciousness. When he came to himself after a while, he saw Ramakrishna looking at him, and stroking his chest.

In after days the Master told his disciples :

"I asked him several questions while he was in that state. I asked him about his antecedents and whereabouts, his mission in this world and the

duration of his mortal life. He dived deep into himself and gave fitting answers to my questions. They only confirmed what I had seen and inferred about him. These things shall be a secret, but I came to know that he was a sage who had attained perfection, a past master in meditation, and that the day he learned his real nature he would give up the body by an act of will. . . . ."[1]

But at the time Ramakrishna told him nothing of all this, although he treated him in the light of his special knowledge, and Naren had a privileged place among the disciples.

But Naren had not yet accepted the title of disciple. He did not want to be the disciple of anyone. He was struck by the incomprehensible power of Ramakrishna. It attracted him, as a magnet attracts iron, but he himself was made of stern metal. His reason would not submit to domination. If in his recent relations with the rationalist Brajendra Seal it had been his heart that strove against his intellect, now his intellect mistrusted his heart. He was resolved to maintain his independence, and to accept nothing from the Master except what could be rigorously controlled by his own reason. The uncritical faith of the others roused his contempt.

No stranger relations can be imagined than those now established between the young man and the old Guru.[2] Naren detested all forms of sentimental

[1] *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 439 *et seq.*

[2] Naren lived for five years with Ramakrishna, at the same time keeping a home of his own at Calcutta. He went to

piety, such as tears or anything that savoured of the effeminate. Naren questioned everything. He never allowed his reason to abdicate for a single instant. He alone weighed all Ramakrishna's words, he alone doubted. Far from being shocked, Ramakrishna loved him the better for it. Before meeting Naren he had been heard to pray :

"O Mother, send me someone to doubt my Realisations."

The Mother granted his prayer. Naren denied the Hindu gods, but at the same time he rejected Advaitism, which he termed atheism.[1] He openly mocked the injunctions of the Hindu Scriptures. He said to Ramakrishna :

"Even if millions of men called you God, if I had not proved it for myself, I would never do so."

Ramakrishna laughingly approved, and said to his disciples :

"Do not accept anything because I say so. Test everything for yourselves."

The keen criticism of Naren, and his passionate arguments filled him with joy. He had a profound respect for his brilliant intellectual sincerity with its tireless quest for the truth ; he regarded it as manifestation of Shivaic power, which would finally overcome all illusion. He said :

"Look, look, what power of penetration ! He is a raging fire consuming all impurities. Mahamaya Herself cannot come nearer to him than ten feet !

Dakshineswar once or twice a week, and sometimes spent four or five days on end with the Master. If he stayed away for a week, Ramakrishna sent for him.

[1] This was the attitude of the Brahmo Samaj.

She is held back by the glory She has imparted to him."

And Naren's knowledge caused him such intense joy that it sometimes melted into ecstasy.

But at other times the old Master was hurt by his sharp criticism, delivered as it was without any consideration for others. Naren said to his face:

"How do you know that your realisations are not the creations of your sick brain, mere hallucinations?"

And Ramakrishna in his trouble would go away, and humbly seek comfort of the Mother, who consoled him with the words:

"Patience! Soon Naren's eyes will be opened."

Sometimes when the everlasting discussions between Naren and the disciples wearied him,[1] he would pray:

"O Mother, give Naren a little of Your Illusion!" so that the fever of his intellect might be somewhat assuaged, and his heart might touch God.

But the tortured spirit of Vivekananda cried out:

"I do not desire God. I desire peace—that is to say, absolute truth, absolute knowledge, absolute infinitude."

He did not see that such a wish overstepped the bounds of reason and showed the imperious unreasonableness of his heart. It was impossible to satisfy his mind with the proof of God. Indian fashion, he maintained:

[1] He said of these discussions: "Water poured into an empty vessel makes a bubbling noise, but when the vessel is full, no sound is heard. The man who has not found God is full of vain disputation about the existence and attitude of Godhead. But he who has seen Him enjoys the Divine bliss in silence."

"If God is real, it is possible to realise Him."

But he gradually discovered that the man of ecstasy, whom he had at first believed to be swayed entirely by the promptings of his heart, was infinitely more master than he was himself in the realm of the intellect. Later he was to say of Ramakrishna:

"Outwardly he was all Bhakta, but inwardly all Jnanin. . . . I am the exact opposite."

But before he came to make such a statement, and before he had yielded of his own free will his proud independence into the Master's hands, he both sought him and fled from him; and between the two there was a reciprocal game of passionate attraction and secret struggle. The brutal frankness of Naren, his lack of consideration for all things that he mistrusted, the implacable war he declared against all charlatanism, and his proud indifference to the opinion of others, drew down upon him enmity and slander, which he was too proud to heed.[1]

[1] Saradananda, who was later one of his friends and most devoted followers, and who has written the best account of his relations with Ramakrishna, admits that he was himself ill-disposed towards Naren, when he met him for the first time at the house of a mutual friend. Naren came in, well dressed and well groomed, with a disdainful air; he sat down humming a Hindi song to himself, and began to smoke without appearing to care for any of the others present. But he took part in the discussion that followed about contemporary literature, and suddenly revealed the greatness of his æsthetic and moral sense, as well as his predilection for Ramakrishna, the only man, he said, whom he had found realising his inner ideal in this life without any compromise. (*Cf.* the Chapter: "Vivekananda and Ramakrishna," in the last volume of the great Biography of Ramakrishna by Saradananda: *Divya Bhava*).

Ramakrishna never allowed them to be said in his presence; for he was sure of Naren. He said that the young man was of the purest gold and that no taint of this world could sully him.[1] His only fear was lest so admirable an intellect might lose its way, and the multiplicity of powers striving within him might be put to a bad use, such as the founding of a new sect or of a new party, instead of being consecrated to the work of union and unity. He had a passionate affection for Naren, but his anxious or tender manifestations of it, if Naren stayed away for any length of time, both embarrassed and irritated the latter. Ramakrishna himself was ashamed of them, but he could not help himself. He infuriated Naren by his excessive praise, as when he publicly placed the recognised fame of Keshab below the problematical fame of this young man, who had as yet accomplished nothing. He went to look for him in the streets of Calcutta, and even in the temple of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj,[2] where his unexpected entry during a service provoked a scandal and roused much scornful criticism. Naren, mortified and touched at the same time, spoke harshly to him in order to rid himself of this pursuit. He

[1] Far from shaking Naren's faith in himself, he encouraged it. He gave him privileges over the other disciples; for instance, he allowed him to touch all kinds of impure food, saying that for such as he such matters were immaterial.

[2] The branch of the Brahmo Samaj, that had broken away from Keshab. It was the most uncompromising from the national Hindu point of view; and it is noteworthy that Naren was then a member of it. Ramakrishna had unwittingly many enemies among its members, who bore him a grudge for the influence he exercised over Keshab.

told him that no man ought to allow himself to be infatuated by another, that if Ramakrishna loved him too much he would forfeit his own spiritual greatness and sink to his level. The simple and pure Ramakrishna listened to him fearfully, and then went to ask the Mother's advice. But he returned comforted.

"Ah, wretch!" he said to Naren, "I will not listen to you. The Mother has told me that I love you because in you I see the Lord. If the day comes when I can no longer see Him, I shall not be able to bear the sight of you."

Soon their parts were reversed. A time came when Naren's presence was received by Ramakrishna with complete indifference. He did not appear to notice him but occupied himself with the others. This went on for several weeks. Nevertheless Naren always came patiently back. Ramakrishna asked him why, since he no longer spoke to him, and Naren replied:

"It is not just your words that attract me. I love you and need to see you."

The Master's spirit gradually took possession of the rebel disciple. In vain the latter ridiculed Ramakrishna's beliefs, especially the two extremes: the cult of images, and faith in an Absolute Unity, —the fascination of God worked slowly.

"Why do you come here, if you do not want to acknowledge my Mother?" Ramakrishna asked him.

"Must I acknowledge Her, if I come?" replied Naren.

"Well," said the Master, "several days hence

you will not only accept Her, but you will weep at the mention of Her name."[1]

[1] Brajendra Nath Seal has confessed the stupefaction caused by the sight of Narendra the iconoclast, the hater of superstitions and idols, worshipping before Kali and Her priest. He condemned him mercilessly, until the day when curiosity urged him to visit Dakshineswar. He spent an afternoon there and came away in a state of moral and physical astonishment. All his preconceived ideas were wavering. Without understanding it he was subjugated by the atmosphere which seemed to emanate from the person of Ramakrishna. It may be interesting to trace the unpremeditated reaction of a great intellectual and rationalist thinker, a man high in his University, who this day has kept his independent judgment:

"I watched with intense interest the transformation that went on under my eyes. The attitude of a young and rampant Vedantist-cum-Hegelian-cum-Revolutionary like myself towards the cult of religious ecstasy and Kali-worship may be easily imagined: and the spectacle of a born inconoclast and free-thinker like Vivekananda, a creative and dominating intelligence, a tamer of souls, himself caught in the meshes of what appeared to me an uncouth, supernatural mysticism was a riddle which my philosophy of the Pure Reason could scarcely read at the time. . . .

"(For pathological curiosity) at last I went . . . . to Dakshineswar, to see and hear Vivekananda's Master, and spent the greater part of a long summer day in the shady and peaceful solitudes of the Temple-garden, returning as the sun set amidst the whirl and rush and roar and the awful gloom of a blinding thunderstorm, with a sense of bewilderment as well moral as physical, and a lurking perception of the truth that the majesty of Law orders the apparently irregular and grotesque, that sense even in its errors is only incipient Reason and that faith in a Saving Power *ab extra* is but the dim reflex of an original act of self-determination. And a significant confirmation of all this came in the subsequent life-history of Vivekananda who, after he had found the firm assurance he sought in the saving Grace and Power of his Master, went about preaching and teaching the creed of the Universal Man, and the absolute and inalienable sovereignty of the Self."

(Article of Brajendra Nath Seal, published in *Prabuddha Bharata,* 1907, and reproduced in *The Life of the Swami Vivekananda,* I, p. 177).

It was the same when Ramakrishna wanted to open the doors of Advaitist Vedantism of identity with the Absolute, to Naren. Naren rejected the idea as blasphemy and madness. He did not let any chance go by of ridiculing it; and one day he and one of the other disciples jeered and gave vent to side-splitting laughter at its extravagance. "This jug," they said, "is God! . . . and these flies are God! . . ." From the adjoining room Ramakrishna heard the laughter of the great children. He came in quietly in a semi-conscious state, and touched Naren.[1] Again a spiritual tornado swept him. All at once everything was changed in Naren's eyes. He saw with amazement that nothing existed but God. He went back to his house. All that he saw, touched, ate, was God. . . . He stopped doing anything, intoxicated by Universal Force. His parents became anxious and thought he was ill. He remained in this condition for some days. Then the dream vanished. But its remembrance remained with Naren as a foretaste of the Advaitic state, and he never afterwards allowed himself to deny its existence.

He then passed through a series of mystic storms. He repeated "Shiva! . . . Shiva!" like a madman. Ramakrishna looked on with compassionate understanding:

[1] For scientific men, who study psycho-physiological problems, it is noteworthy that these "touches," which provoked in the subjects concerned immediate experience of changed conditions, were nearly always (if not always) produced when Ramakrishna was in a state of semi-consciousness or of complete hypnosis. There was therefore nothing in them analogous to calculated action of the will independent of the energies

"Yes, I remained for twelve years in that condition."

But his leonine nature, which leaped in great bounds from ironic denial to illumination, would never have undergone a lasting transformation, if the citadel had not been mined from within and not from without. The rough scourge of sorrow came suddenly to whip him out of his comfortable doubt and the luxury of intellectualism on which he prided himself, and brought him face to face with the tragic problem of evil and existence.

*

At the beginning of 1884 his careless and prodigal father died, suddenly carried off by a heart attack, and the family found itself faced with ruin. There were six or seven mouths to feed, and a swarm of creditors. From that day onwards Naren tasted misery, knew the vain search for employment and the denial of friends. He has told his distress in pages that are among the most poignant of confessions :[1]

"I almost died of hunger. Barefoot I wandered from office to office, repulsed on all sides. I gained experience of human sympathy. This was my first contact with the realities of life. I discovered that it had no room for the weak, the poor, the deserted. Those who several days before would have been proud to help me, turned away their faces, although they possessed the means to do so.

governed by it. It might almost be described as a forced descent of another into the abyss he had first descended himself.

[1] This account is taken from the *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 428 *et seq.*

The world seemed to me to be the creation of a devil. One burning day, when I could hardly stand upon my feet, I sat down in the shade of a monument. Several friends were there, and one began to sing a hymn about the abundant grace of God. It was like a blow aimed deliberately at my head. I thought of the pitiable condition of my mother and brothers, and cried: 'Stop singing that song! Such fantasies may sound pleasantly in the ears of those who are born with a silver spoon in their mouth, and whose parents are not at home dying of hunger. Oh yes, there was a time when I too thought like that! But now that I am faced with all the cruelty of life, it rings in my ears like deadly mockery.' My friend was hurt. He could not make allowance for my terrible distress. More than once, when I saw that there was not enough food to go round at home, I went out, telling my mother that I was invited elsewhere, and I fasted. My rich friends sometimes asked me to go to their houses to sing, but practically not a single one of them showed any curiosity about my misfortunes; and I kept them to myself. . . ."

Throughout this period he continued to pray to God every morning. One day his mother heard him, and, her piety severely shaken by too great misfortune, said to him:

"Fool, be quiet! You have made yourself hoarse with praying to God from your childhood up. And what has He done for you? . . ."

Then he in his turn was filled with anger against God. Why did He not answer his anguished

appeals? Why did He allow so much suffering on the earth? And the bitter words of the Pandit Vidyasagar came into his mind:

"If God is good and gracious, why then do millions of people die for want of a few morsels of food?"[1]

A furious revolt arose to heaven. He declared war upon God.

He had never been able to conceal his thoughts and now he spoke openly against God. He proved that He was either non-existent or evil. His reputation as an atheist became established, and as is the practice of devout people, unmentionable motives were adduced for his unbelief, and his habits were maligned. Such dishonesty hardened him, and he took a sombre delight in boasting publicly that in such a depraved world a victim, as he was, of the persecutions of fortune had every right to seek momentary respite in whatever pleasure he might find; and that if he, Narendra, decided that such means were efficacious, he should certainly not shrink from using them for fear of anybody. To some of Ramakrishna's disciples, who offered their pious remonstrances, he replied that only a coward

[1] The Pandit Vidyasagar (Iswar Chandra, 1820-91) was a social reformer, the director of the Sanskrit College at Calcutta, and knew Ramakrishna. His memory is held in veneration less for his great learning than for his love of humanity. He was the impotent witness of the famine of 1864 with its more than 100,000 victims, which made him reject God, and devote himself wholly to the service of man. Vivekananda in 1898 spoke of him with hushed respect and without a word of blame during a journey in Kashmir, as was noted down by Sister Nivedita in her account of conversation with the Swami. (*Notes of Some Wanderings with the Swami Vivekananda*, Udbodhan Office, Calcutta).

believed in God through fear. And he drove them away. At the same time the idea that Ramakrishna might blame him like the rest troubled him. Then his pride revolted. "What does it matter? If a man's reputation rests on such slender foundations, I do not care. I spurn it under foot! . . . ."

All judged him lost except Ramakrishna in his retreat at Dakshineswar, and he kept his confidence in Naren;[1] but he was waiting for the psychological moment. He knew that Naren's salvation could only come from him.

The summer passed. Naren continued his harassing search for a means of livelihood. One evening when he had eaten nothing, he sank down, exhausted and wet through, by the side of the road in front of a house. The delirium of fever raged in his prostrate body. Suddenly it seemed as if the folds enveloping his soul were rent asunder, and there was light.[2] All his past doubts were automatically solved. He could say truly: "I see, I know, I believe, I am undeceived . . ."

His mind and body were at rest. He went in and spent the night in meditation. In the morning his mind was made up. He had decided to renounce the world as his grandfather had done,

[1] Afterwards Vivekananda said: "Ramakrishna was the only one who had unswerving faith in me. Even my mother and my brothers were not capable of it. His unshakable confidence joined me to him for ever. He alone knew the meaning of love."

[2] Revelation came always by the same mechanical process at the exact moment when the limit of vitality had been reached, and the last reserves of the will to struggle exhausted.

and he fixed a day when this definite vow was to be accomplished.

Now on that very day Ramakrishna, all unknowing, came to Calcutta, and begged Naren to come back with him for the night to Dakshineswar. Naren tried in vain to escape ; but he was obliged to follow the Master. That night, shut up in his room with him, Ramakrishna began to sing, and his beautiful chant brought tears to the eyes of the young disciple ; for he realised that the Master had divined his purpose. Ramakrishna said to him :

" I know that you cannot remain in the world. But for my sake, stay in it as long as I live."

Naren went back home. He had found some work in a translation office and in a solicitor's office, but he had no permanent employment, so that the fate of his family was never assured from one day to the next. He asked Ramakrishna to pray for him and his.

" My child," said Ramakrishna, " I cannot offer up those prayers. Why do you not do so yourself ?"

Naren went into the temple of the Mother. He was in a state of exalted fervour ; a flood of love and faith coursed through him. But when he returned and Ramakrishna asked if he had prayed, Naren realised that he had forgotten to ask for the alleviation of his misery. Ramakrishna told him to go back. He returned a second time and a third time. No sooner did he enter the temple than the purpose of his prayers faded before his eyes. At the third attempt indeed he remembered what he had come to ask, but he was

overcome with shame. "What pitiful interests they were, for which to importune the Mother!" He prayed instead:

"Mother, I need nothing save to know and to believe."

From that day a new life began for him. He knew and believed, and his faith, born, like that of Goethe's old harpist,[1] in misery, never forgot the taste of bread soaked in tears, nor his suffering brethren who had shared the crumbs. One sublime cry proclaimed his faith to the world:

"The only God in whom I believe, is the sum total of all souls, and above all I believe in my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races. . . ."

The Galilean had conquered.[2] The tender Master of Bengal had broken the resistance of his pride. Ramakrishna in future had no more submissive son than the great Kshatriya, who was born to command. So complete did their union become, that at times they seemed to be indentified with each other. It was necessary to exercise a moderating influence over this transported soul, that did not know what it meant to give by halves. Ramakrishna knew the dangers it ran. Its rough and tumultuous course leaped beyond the bounds of reason from knowledge to love, from the absolute need for meditation to the absolute need for action. It yearned to embrace everything at once. During the last days of Ramakrishna's life we

[1] An allusion to some of Goethe's most beautiful *Lieder* in *Wilhelm Meister*. The greatest European musicians, Schubert, Hugo Wolf, etc., have set them to music.

[2] The cry of the Emperor Julian as he was dying, after having fought in vain against Christ.

shall often see Naren urging the Master to allow him the highest superconscious revelation, the great ecstasy, from which there is no return, Nirvikalpa Samadhi ; but Ramakrishna emphatically refused him.

One day, Swami Shivananda told me, he was present in the garden of Cossipore, near Calcutta, when Naren really attained this state. "Seeing him unconscious, his body as cold as that of a corpse, we ran in great agitation to the Master and told him what had happened. The Master showed no anxiety ; he merely smiled and said : 'Very well !' and then relapsed into silence. Naren returned to outward consciousness and came to the Master. The Master said to him : 'Well now do you understand ? This (the highest realisation) will henceforward remain under lock and key. You have the Mother's work to do. When it is finished, She will undo the lock.' Naren replied : 'Master, I was happy in Samadhi. In my infinite joy I had forgotten the world. I beseech you to let me remain in that state !' 'For shame !' cried the Master. 'How can you ask such things ? I thought you were a vast receptacle of life, and here you wish to stay absorbed in personal joy like an ordinary man . . . . This realisation will become so natural to you, by the grace of the Mother, that in your normal state you will realise the One Divinity in all beings ; you will do great things in the world ; you will bring spiritual consciousness to men, and assuage the misery of the humble and the poor.'"[1]

[1] Letter of December 7, 1927.

He had discerned the part for which Vivekananda was cast, and against his will he forced him to play it.

"Ordinary souls," he said, "fear to assume the responsibility of instructing the world. A worthless piece of wood can only just manage to float, and if a bird settles on it, immediately it sinks. But Naren is different. He is like the great tree trunks, bearing men and beasts upon the bosom of the Ganges."[1]

He had marked on the giant's forehead the sign of St. Christopher[2]—the carrier of men.

[1] *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, II, p. 42.

[2] An allusion to the Christian legend of St. Christopher (whose name means the carrier of Christ and who was a giant). He carried people on his shoulders across a river, and one day the Christ Child came to him. (*Cf.* the last page of the novel, *Jean Christophe*).

XI

THE SWAN SONG

And so from 1881 onwards he lived at Dakshineswar surrounded by disciples, who loved him as a father, lulled by the sweet murmur of the Ganges. The eternal song of the river, turning and flowing northwards with the incoming tide at noon, was the undercurrent of this beautiful companionship. And it mingled at dawn and sunset with the chime of bells, the blowing of conchs, the melody of the flute, (Rasunchauki), the clashing of cymbals and the temple hymns, that punctuated the days of the Gods and Goddesses.[1] The intoxicating perfume of the sacred garden was borne

[1] The book containing the conversations (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*) recalls at every turn the setting and the atmosphere.

Before day-break the bells softly announced the service of matins. The lights were kindled. In the hall of music the morning hymns were played by flutes accompanied by drums and cymbals. The east was not red before flowers had already been gathered in the garden as an offering to the Gods. The disciples, who had spent the night with the Master, meditated as they sat near the edge of his bed. Ramakrishna got up and walked about naked singing in his sweet voice; he tenderly communed with the Mother. Then all the instruments played their symphony in concert. The disciples performed their ablutions; then returned to find the Master on the verandah; and the conversations continued overlooking the Ganges.

At noon the bells announced the end of worship in the temples of Kali and Vishnu and the twelve temples of Shiva. The sun burned down. The breeze blew from the south, the tide rose. After a meal the Master took a short rest and then the conversations began again.

like incense on the breeze. Between the columns of the semi-circular verandah with its sheltering awning, sails, multicoloured like a swarm of butterflies, could be seen passing along the river, the image of Eternity.

But the precincts of the sanctuary were throbbing with the ceaseless waves of a different human river—pilgrims, worshippers, pandits, religious and curious persons of all sorts and conditions from the great neighbouring city or other parts of India, crowding to see and overwhelm with questions the mysterious man, who yet did not consider himself in any way remarkable. He always answered them in his charming patois with unwearied patience and that air of familiar good grace, which, without losing contact with the deep realities, allowed nothing to go unobserved in the scenes and the everyday people passing before him. He could both play the child and judge as the sage. This perfect, laughing, loving, penetrating spontaneity, to which nothing human was alien, was the chief secret of his charm. In truth such a hermit was very different from those of our Christian world! If he sought out and absorbed sorrow, it disappeared within him; nothing morose or austere could grow in his soil. The great purifier of men who could free the soul from its swaddling clothes and wash away all stain, making a saint of a Girish by his indulgent smile and his piercing and serene glance, would not

At night the temple lamp-lighter kindled the lamps. One lamp burned in a corner of Ramakrishna's room where he sat absorbed. The music of conchs and the temple bells announced the evening service. Under a full moon the conversations continued

admit into the air of the beautiful garden of Dakshineswar, redolent of the scent of roses and jasmine, the morbid idea of shameful sin veiling its nakedness by an eternal preoccupation with itself. He said :

" Certain Christians and Brahmos see in a sense of sin the sum total of religion. Their ideal of a devout man is one who prays : " O Lord, I am a sinner ![1] Deign to pardon my sins ! . . .' They forget that a sense of sin is a sign of the first and the lowest step of spiritual development. They do not take the force of habit into consideration. If you say : ' I am a sinner,' eternally, you will remain a sinner to all eternity. . . . You ought rather to repeat : ' I am not bound, I am not bound. . . . *Who can bind me ? I am the son of God, the* King of Kings. . . .' Make your will work and you will be free ! The idiot who repeats without stopping : ' I am a slave,' ends by really becoming a slave. The miserable man, who repeats tirelessly: ' I am a sinner,' really becomes a sinner. But that man is free who says : ' I am free from the bondage of the world. I am free. Is not the Lord our Father ? . . .' Bondage is of the mind, but freedom is also of the mind. . . ."[2]

[1] What would he have said if he had known the Oratorien of the seventeenth century, Francois de Clugny (1637-94) whom the Abbe Bremond revived ? He revels in a state of sin, and has no other purpose in life than to develop his "*Mystic of Sinners*" in three books seeking of sin, yet written in perfect innocence ! (1. *The Devotion of Sinners by a Sinner*. 2. *The Manual of Sinners by a Sinner*. 3. *Concerning the Prayers of Sinners by a Sinner*). *Cf.* Henri Bremond : *La metaphysique des saints*, I, p. 279 *et seq.*

[2] *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, I, pp. 293 and 178. He repeats this great saying, which I should like to inscribe

He let the wind of his joy and freedom blow on all around him. And languid souls, oppressed by the weight of the tropical sky, unfolded again their faded leaves. He comforted the weariest with the words: "The rains will come. Patience! You will become green again."

It was the home of freed souls—those who were —and those who would be—time does not count in India. The Sunday receptions often partook of the nature of little festivals, Sankirtanas, and on ordinary days his interviews with his disciples never took the form of doctrinal instruction. Doctrine was immaterial. The only essential was practice suited to each spirit, to each occasion of life with the object of drawing out the essence of life in each man, while he exercised full liberty of spirit. All means were good: Inward concentration as well as the free play of the intellect, brief ecstasies as well as rich parables, laughing stories and even the observation of the comedy of the universe by sharp and mocking eyes.

The Master is sitting on his little bed and listening to the confidences of the disciples. He shares in their intimate cares and family affairs; he affectionately prods the resigned Yogananda, curbs the impetuous Vivekananda, and mocks the superstitious ghosts of Niranjanananda. He loves to race these young run-away colts against each other. Then he will fling into the confusion of impassioned argument just the pregnant and mischievous remark that will enlighten them and

on the heart of all believers: "God can never appear where there is shame, hatred or fear." (*Sri Ramakrishna's Teachings*, I, par. 316).

bring them back at a walking pace. Without seeming to use the reins, he knows how to restore to the golden means those who go too far and those who do not go far enough, how to awaken the slumbering spirit and how to restrain excess of zeal. His eyes can rest with tenderness on the pure face of his St. John, Premananda (Baburam), one of those whom he classes with the "Nitya-siddhas"—those who are pure and perfect before their birth[1] and have no need of instruction—or sparkle with irony when faced with exaggerated Puritanism:

"Too much concentration on ceremonial purity becomes a plague. People afflicted with this disease have no time to think of man or God."

He kept the neophytes from the useless and dangerous practices of the Raja Yoga.[2] What point was there in risking life and health when all that was necessary was to open the eyes and heart in order to meet God at every step?

"Arjuna invoked Sri Krishna as the Absolute .... Krishna said to him: 'Come for a while and see what I am like.' He led him to a certain spot and asked him: 'What do you see?' 'A

[1] To this group of the elect Narendra, Rakhal and Bhavanath also belonged (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, I, p. 238). It is noteworthy that their particular type of spirit had nothing to do with their selection. Baburam was a fore-ordained Jnanin and not a Bhakta.

[2] *Cf. Saradananda:* Ramakrishna said to his disciples: "These practices are no longer for this iron age (Kali), when human beings are very feeble and short-lived. They have no time to run such grave risks. And it is no longer necessary. The sole object of these practices is concentration of mind; and this is easily attained by all who meditate with piety. The grace of the Lord has made the way of realisation easy. It is only necessary to carry back to Him that power of love,

great tree,' said Arjuna, 'with bunches of berries hanging from it.' 'No, my friend,' said Sri Krishna, 'draw near and look closer; these are not blackberries but innumerable Sri Krishnas'. . . . ."[1]

And was there any need for pilgrimages to holy places?

"It is the sanctity of men that makes the sanctity of places. Otherwise how can a place purify a man?"

God is everywhere. God is in us. Life and the Universe are His Dream.

But while with his clever fingers he embroidered apologues[2] upon this everlasting theme, the little peasant of Kamarpukur, who united in himself the two natures of Martha and Mary,[3] knew how to recall his disciples to practical life and humble domestic details; he did not allow idleness, uncleanness or disorder, and in these respects he could teach the sons of the great middle classes;

which we pour out on the beings surrounding us." (A freely condensed translation).

[1] *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, II, p. 16.

[2] Here is one beautiful example among many others:

"A wood-cutter went to sleep and dreamed. A friend woke him up. 'Ah!' said the wood-cutter, 'why did you disturb me? I had become a great king, the father of seven children. My sons were accomplished in war and the arts. I was enthroned and occupied with the affairs of state. Why did you shatter this happy world?'

"The friend replied: 'What harm have I done? It was only a dream!'

"'You do not understand,' the wood-cutter answered. 'To be a king in a dream is as true as being a wood-cutter. If to be a wood-cutter is real, to be a king in a dream is real also.'" (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, II, p. 235).

[3] The Martha and Mary of the Gospel according to St. Luke, Chapter X.

he himself set the example, scouring his house and garden.

Nothing escaped his eyes. He dreamed, he saw, he acted, and his gay wisdom always kept the gift of childlike laughter. This is how he amused himself by mimicking worldings and false zealots :

"The Master imitated a Kirtani (a professional singer of religious hymns) to the great amusement of the disciples. The Kirtani and her troupe made their entrance into the assembly. She was richly dressed and held a coloured handkerchief in her hand. If some venerable gentleman came in, she greeted him as she sang, and said to him : 'Please come in !' And she would raise her sari from her arm to show the ornaments adorning it. The Master's mimicry made the disciples roar with laughter. Paltu rolled upon the ground. The Master said, smiling at him : 'What a child ! Paltu, do not go and tell your father. The slight esteem in which he holds me would vanish entirely. He has become an Englishman pure and simple !' . . . ."

Here are some other types as he described them :

"There are people," said Ramakrishna, "who never want to chatter so badly as at daily worship. But being forbidden to speak, they gesticulate and grimace with closed lips : 'Euh ! Euh ! Bring me this . . . . Pass me that . . . . Chut ! Chut ! . . . .' One is telling his beads ; but while so engaged he sees the fish-monger, and while his beads slip through his fingers he has shown him the fish he wants . . . A woman went to bathe

in the sacred waters of the Ganges. She ought to have been thinking about God, but this is what she was gossiping: 'What jewels are they offering your son? . . . . Such and such a person is ill . . . . Such and such a person has gone to see his *fiancee*. . . . And do you think the dowry will be a large one? . . . . Harish adores me, he cannot do without me for a single hour . . . . I have not been able to come for a long time; the engagement of so-and-so's daughter has taken place and I have been so busy!'—And ta, ta, ta. . . . She came to bathe in the sacred waters, but she thinks of anything but that. . . ."

And at that point as his glance fell upon one of his audience, he passed into Samadhi.[1]

When he returned again to earth he resumed the thread of his interrupted discourse without a break, or else sank one of his beautiful songs to the Mother "with the blue skin" or to dark Krishna the Beloved:[2]

"Oh, the sound of the smooth flute played in the wood yonder! I come! I come! I must . . . My Beloved with the dark skin awaits me. . . . O my friends, say, will you not come with me? . . . My Beloved! . . . I fear that to you he is nothing but a name, a sound void of meaning. . . . . But to me he is my heart, my soul, my life! . . . ."

"Plunge, plunge, plunge in the depths, O my soul! Plunge into the Ocean of Beauty! . . . .

[1] *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, II, pp. 285-86.

[2] These colours had a symbolic sense for Ramakrishna. The dark blue of the Mother brought the depths of the sky to his mind

Go and search the regions deeper than the depths of the seas! Thou wilt attain the jewel, the treasure of Prema (Divine Love). In thy heart is the Brindaban (the legendary home) of the God of Love. Go and seek, go and seek, go and seek! And thou shalt find. Then the lamp of knowledge will burn inextinguishably. Who is this being that steers a boat over the earth—over the earth—over the solid earth? . . . ."

"Companion of the Absolute, O Mother, Thou art plunged in the bliss of Play. . . . The wine of joy intoxicates. Thy feet reel, but never lose their balance. The Absolute, Thy husband, is living at Thy side, motionless. Thou drawest Him to Thy breast, and losest all control of Thyself. The Universe trembles beneath Thy feet. Madness is in Thine eyes and in the eyes of Thy husband. . . . . In truth the world is a thing of joy . . . . O my Mother with the blue skin! . . . ."[1]

His song shares in the wine of love intoxicating the Mother. . . .

"One of his glances," Vivekananda once said, "could change a whole life."

And he spoke from experience, this Naren, who had upheld his philosophic doubts in passionate revolt against Ramakrishna, until he felt the melting in his constant fire and avowed himself vanquished. He had proved the truth of what Ramakrishna had told him: that "living faith may be given and received in a tangible fashion and more truly than anything else in the world." Ramakrishna's certainty was so gentle yet so strong

[1] *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, passim.*

that the most brutal denials of these young people made him smile ; he was so certain that they would disappear like morning mist before the midday sun. When Kaliprasad assailed him with a torrent of denials, he said :

"My son, do you believe in God ?"

"No."

"Do you believe in religion ?"

"No, nor in the Vedas, nor in any Scripture. I do not believe in anything spiritual."

The Master indulgently replied :

"My son, if you had said that to any other Guru, what would have happened to you ? But go in peace ! Others have passed through these trials before you. Look at Naren ! He believes. Your doubts will also be enlightened. You will believe."

And Kaliprasad later became the holy apostle, Abhedananda.

Many university men, sceptics and agnostics were similarly touched by this little man, who said the simplest things in his peasant's language, but whose inner light pierced to the depths of the soul. There was no need for his visitors to confess themselves.

"The eyes," he said, "are the windows of the soul." He read through them at the first glance. In the midst of a crowd he could go straight to a bashful visitor, who was hiding from him, and put his finger on his doubt, his anxiety, his secret wound. He never preached. There was no soul-searching or sadness. Just a word, a smile, the touch of his hand, communicated a nameless peace, a happiness for which men yearned. It is said that

a young man on whom his glance rested, stayed for more than a year in an ecstasy, wherein he did nothing but repeat :

"Lord ! Lord ! My well-beloved ! My well-beloved ! "

The Master forgave everything, for he believed in infinite Kindness. If he saw that some of those who asked his help were not fortunate enough to attain the God, whom they sought, in this life, he desired to communicate to them at least a foretaste of bliss.

No word with him was only a word ; it was an act, a reality.

He said :

"Do not speak of love for your brother ! Realise it ! Do not argue about doctrine and religions. There is only one. All rivers flow to the Ocean. Flow and let others flow too ! The great stream carves out for itself according to the slope of its journey—according to race, time and temperament —its own distinct bed. But it is all the same water . . Go . . . Flow on towards the Ocean ! . . . ."

The force of his joyously flowing stream communicated itself to all souls. He was the power, he was the slope, he was the current ; and the other streams and brooks ran towards his river. He was the Ganges itself.

XII

THE RIVER RE-ENTERS THE SEA

He was nearing the Ocean. The end was approaching. His feeble body was almost daily consumed in the fire of ecstasy and worn out by his constant gift of himself to the famished crowds. Sometimes like a sulky child he complained to the Mother of the flood of visitors devouring him day and night. In his humorous way he said to Her[1] :

" Why do You bring hither all these people, who are like milk diluted with five times its own quantity of water ? My eyes are destroyed with blowing the fire to dry up the water ! My health is gone. It is beyond my strength. Do it Yourself, if You want it done. This (*pointing to his body*) is nothing but a burst drum, and if You go on beating it day in and day out, how long do You think it will last ?"[2]

But he never turned anybody away. He said :

" Let me be condemned to be born over and over again, even in the form of a dog, if so I can be of help to a single soul ! "

And again :

" I will give up twenty thousand such bodies to help one man. It is glorious to help even one man ! "[3]

[1] I am quite sure that some of our good believers of the Middle Ages, such as the men of the people in Picardy and Burgundy, must sometimes have said the same thing.

[2] *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 694.

[3] Vivekananda : *My Master.*

He even reproached himself for his ecstasies, because they took time that might otherwise have been given to others :

" O Mother, stop me from enjoying them ! Let me stay in my normal state, so that I can be of more use in the world."

During his last days when his disciples protected him in spite of himself from the importunity of devotees, he said :

" How I suffer because no one needs my help to-day ! "[1]

His great friend, the illustrious chief of the Brahmo Samaj, Keshab Chunder Sen, preceded him in death. He died in 1884. With tears in his eyes, Ramakrishna said of him shortly before his death that " the rose tree is to be transplanted because the gardener wants beautiful roses of him."

Afterwards he said :

" Half of me has perished."

But the other half, if it is possible to use such an expression, was the humble people. He was as easy of access to them, if not more so, as to the most learned ; and among the familiar friends of his last years he counted, in the same category as the disciples so dear to his heart, simple people, madmen of God. Such a one was old Gopaler Ma, whose simple story is worthy of a place among the Franciscan legends :

An old woman of sixty, widowed while still a girl, she had dedicated herself to the Lord. The hunger of her unassuaged maternal love had made

[1] Mukerji, *loc. cit.*

her for thirty years adopt the child Krishna, Gopala, as her own, until it had become a harmless mania. No sooner had she met Ramakrishna than his God-filled glance made little Gopala issue from her. The warm compassion of the Master, which made the hidden desires and sorrows of those who came near him his own, lent inspiration to the unsatisfied dream of the childless mother, and he put the God-Child into her arms. From that moment the little Gopala never left the mother, who had adopted Him. Henceforward she did not pray ; she had no need to pray, for she lived in unbroken communion with her God. She threw her rosary into the river and spent her days prattling with the Child. This state lasted two month and then was mitigated ; the Child only appeared in moments of meditation. But the old woman's heart was filled with happiness, and Ramakrishna tenderly regarded her joy. But his ever present sense of fun made him ask the old woman to tell her story to the haughty Naren, so proud of his critical reason, who held such visions to be stupid and morbid illusions. The old woman quite simply interrupted her maternal chatter, and made Naren her judge :

"Sir," she said to him, "I am only a poor ignorant woman. I do not rightly understand things. You are learned. Tell me, do you think it is true ? "

Naren, deeply moved, answered :

" Yes, mother, it is quite true."

It was in 1884 that Ramakrishna's health took a serious turn. While he was in a trance he dislocated his left arm and it was very painful. A great change took place in him. He divided his infirm body and his wandering soul into two. He no

longer spoke of "*I.*" *He was no longer* "*me.*" He called himself "This." The sick man more intensely than before perceived "Lila . . . the Play . . . . the God who disports Himself in men. . . . The man roughly seized his real Self and then fell into silent amazement; his joy knew no bounds, as if he had suddenly and unexpectedly met one of his dear ones. . . . When Shiva saw his real self he cried: 'Such am I! Such am I!' and danced for joy."

In April the following year his throat became inflamed. Overstrain from constant talking and the dangerous Samadhis, which made blood flow in his throat, certainly had something to do with it.[1] The doctors he consulted forbade both speech and esctasy, but he paid no attention to them. At a great

[1] But there was more in it than this. Like some famous Christian mystics* he healed others by taking their ills upon himself. In a vision his body appeared to him covered with sores, the sins of others: "He took upon himself the Karma of others." And to this fact he owed his last illness. He had become the scapegoat of humanity.

The idea of suffering the ills of others in his own body, and thus relieving them when a certain degree of sanctity has been attained, is a very old one in India; and Swami Ashokananda, whom I have questioned on the subject, has given me some striking illustrations from the Holy Books—from the *Mahabharata* (Adi Parva, Chapter 84, and Shanti Parva, Chapter 281)—from the sayings of Buddha, and the life of Chaitanya in the fifteenth century. All spiritual personages do not possess this power. It only belongs theologically to the Avataras (Incarnations) and to the chosen souls, their attendants. Neither pious men nor saints possess it even after they have attained divine realisation, although popular superstition falsely attributes it to them in these days, and simple people may often be seen approaching Sannyasins and Sadhus (as also happened to Jesus) in the hope of unloading upon them their physical and spiritual ills. It is still a common belief in India. One of its consequences is the so-called

Vaishnava religious festival he spent himself without measure, and in return the disease grew worse. It became practically impossible for him to eat. Nevertheless he continued to receive those who came to him day and night. Then one night he had

Guruvada: If a spiritual person accepts a disciple, not only does he give him spiritual instruction, but he takes upon himself everything that might be an obstacle in his disciple's Karma—all his sins. The Guru then has to suffer for the Karmas of his disciples, for nobody can cancel a single Karma; it is merely transferred to another.—Swami Ashokananda has added this to show to what point the belief of expiation by proxy is enrooted in the spirit of the best minds in India to-day: "It is not just a theory with us. We have seen examples of it, as when the immediate disciples of Ramakrishna suffered for having thus taken upon themselves the evils of others, either in their capacity as Gurus or by the effect of simple touch. They have often spoken of their sufferings on this account."

* In particular St. Lydwine, who was charged with the physical sufferings of others, St. Marguerite-Marie, who took upon herself the sufferings of souls in Purgatory, St. Catherine of Siena and Marie de Vallees, who prayed for the pains of hell in order to save other souls from falling into them, and St. Vincent de Paul, who was deprived of his faith for seven years in order to obtain the faith of an unbeliever.

Such sacrifices by proxy are in conformity with pure Christian Catholic doctrine, which considers humanity as the mystic body of Christ. Christ himself set the example. The prophet Isaiah, who realised the Messiah in advance (LIII, 45), said: "He hath borne our briefs and carried our sorrows. . . . He was wounded for our transgressions. . . The chastisement of our peace was upon him and with his stripes we are healed." The Sacrifice of the Cross has always been considered by the Catholic Church as the one complete and universal expiation. Thus between ancient India and Judea of the Prophets and of Christ there is the same kindred thought, born of the universal urge of the soul and belonging to the most profound depths of human nature. (*Cf.* also the familiar words of Christ, when he instituted the Lord's Supper: "This is my blood . . . which is shed for many for the remission of sins." St. Matthew, XXVI, 28).

hæmorrhage of the throat. The doctors diagnosed cancer. His chief disciples persuaded him to put himself for a time under the care of Dr. Mahendra Lal Sarkar of Calcutta. In September, 1885, a small house was rented where Ramakrishna's wife found a corner for herself so that she might supervise his regime. The most faithful disciples watched during the night. The majority of them were poor, and they mortgaged, borrowed or pawned their effects in order to pay the expenses of the Master's illness —an effort that cemented their union. Dr. Sarkar was a rationalist, who did not share the religious views of Ramakrishna, and told him so frankly. But the more he came to know his patient the deeper did his respect for him become, until he treated him for nothing. He came to see him three times a day and spent hours with him[1] (which, it may be observed in passing, was perhaps not the best way to make him better). He said to him:

"I love you so dearly because of your devotion to truth. You never deviate by a hair's breadth from what you believe to be true. . . Do not imagine that I am flattering you. If my father was in the wrong I should tell him so."

But he openly censured the religious adoration rendered to him by the disciples:

"To say that the Infinite came down to earth in the form of a man is the ruin of all religions."

Ramakrishna maintained an amused silence,

[1] He was present during several ecstasies and studied them from a medical point of view. A study of his notes would be a great interest for European science. It is known that a stethoscopic examination of the heart and the condition of the eyes during Samadhi show all the symptoms of the condition of death

but the disciples grew animated in these discussions, which only served to increase their mutual esteem ; their faith in their Master, whom suffering seemed to illuminate, was strengthened. They tried to understand why such a trial was imposed upon him, and divided into groups holding different views. The most exalted, headed by Girish the redeemed sinner, declared that the Master himself had willed his illness, so that he might establish the communion of apostles round him. The rationalists with Naren as their mouthpiece admitted that the Master's body was subject to the laws of nature like other men's. But they all recognised the Divine presence in the dying man ;[1] and on the day of the great annual festival of Kali, of which Ramakrishna to their surprise made no mention, but spent it

[1] Among the crowds still wishing to see the inspired man, there came on October 31, 1885, a Christian from Northern India, Prabhudayal Misra. He had an interview with Ramakrishna, which gives a typical example of the spirit of synthesis enveloping in its accommodating atmosphere the confessions of men holding seemingly contradictory views, when they have been filtered through the Indian soul. This Indian Christian found it quite possible to believe at the same time in Christ and Ramakrishna ! People were present during the following conversation :

The Christian : "It is the Lord, who shines through all creatures."

Ramakrishna : "The Lord is one, but He is called by a thousand names."

The Christian : "Jesus is not simply the Son of Mary ; he is God himself. (*And then he turned to the disciples and pointed to Ramakrishna*). And this is a man whom you see before you ; but at times he is none other than God Himself, and you do not recognise Him."

At the end of the interview Ramakrishna told him that his longing for God would be fulfilled. And the Christian made him the gift of himself.

absorbed in ecstasy, they realised that the Mother was indwelling within him. The exaltation excited by this belief had its dangers, the chief of them being an access of convulsive sentimentalism. They had—or pretended to have—visions and ecstasies with laughter, song and tears. Naren then showed for the first time the vigour of his reason and his will. He treated them with contempt. He told them that "the Master's ecstasies had been bought by a life of heroic austerity and desperate conflict for the sake of knowledge ; that their effusions were nothing but the vapourings of sick imaginations—when they were not lies. Those who were ill ought to take more care of themselves ! Let them eat more and so react against spasms which were worthy only of ridiculous females ! And let them beware ! Of those who encouraged a religion of ostentatious emotion eighty per cent became scoundrels and fifteen per cent lunatics." His words acted like a cold douche. They were ashamed and the majority humbly confessed that their ecstasies were shams. Naren's action did not stop there. He gathered these young people together and imposed upon them a virile discipline. In their need for action he advised them to devote themselves to some definite object. The young lion's cub began to assert himself in those days as the future sovereign of the Order, although he himself was not free from his own difficulties and struggles. For him these days marked the crisis of despair, when he had to make the final choice between the conflicting forces of his nature—harrowing days, fruitful days, preparing the soul for harvest.

Ramakrishna grew worse. Dr. Sarkar advised his removal from Calcutta to the country. Towards the middle of December 1885, he was taken to a house in the suburbs in the midst of the beautiful gardens of Cossipore, and there he spent the last eight months of his mortal life. Twelve of his young chosen disciples never left him until the end.[1] Naren directed their activities and their prayers. They begged the Master to join with them in praying for his recovery, and the visit of a Pandit, who shared their faith, gave them an opportunity to renew their entreaties.

"The Scriptures," said the Pandit to Ramakrishna, "declare that saints like you can cure themselves by an effort of will."

Ramakrishna replied:

"My mind has been given to God once and for all. Would you have me ask it back?"

His disciples reproached him for not wishing to be restored to health.

"Do you think my sufferings are voluntary? I wish to recover, but that depends on the Mother."

"Then pray to Her."

"It is easy for you to say that, but I cannot speak the words."

Naren begged:

"For our sake!"

"Very well," said the Master sweetly. "I will try what I can do."

[1] Narendra, Rakhal, Baburam, Niranjan, Yogin, Latu, Tarak, the two Gopals, Kali, Sasi, and Sarat. Ramakrishna said that his illness had divided the disciples for him into those of the "Inner Circle (Antaranga) and those of the Outer Circle (Bahiranga)."

They left him alone for several hours. When they returned the Master said :

"I said to Her : 'Mother, I can eat nothing because of my suffering. Make it possible for me to eat a little !' She pointed you all out to me and said : 'What ! Thou canst eat through all these mouths !' I was ashamed and could not utter another word."

Several days later he said[1] :

"My teaching is almost finished. I cannot instruct people any longer ; for I see the whole world is filled with the Lord.[2] So I ask myself : 'Whom can I teach ?'"

On January 1, 1886, he felt better and walked a few step in the garden. There he blessed his disciples.[3] The effects of his blessings manifested themselves in different ways—in silent ecstasy or in loquacious transports of joy. But all were agreed that they received as it were an electric shock, an access of power, so that each one realised his chosen ideal at a bound. (The distinguishing characteristic of Ramakrishna as a religious chief was always that he did not communicate a precise faith, but the energy necessary for faith ; he played the part, if I may say so, of a mighty spiritual dynamo). In their abounding joy the disciples in the garden, whom the Master had blessed, called to those in the house to come and share the bliss of his benediction. In this connection an incident took place that might have come from the Chris-

[1] On December 23, 1885, according to M. (Mahendra Nath Gupta), who noted it down in his *Gospel*, II, p. 354.

[2] Literally : "All is Rama."

[3] Each received an appropriate benediction, so it is said.

tian Gospel: The humble Latu and Sarat the Brahmin were taking advantage of the Master's absence to clean his room and make his bed. They heard the calls and saw the whole scene from above; but they continued their task of love, thus renouncing their share of joy.

Naren alone remained unsatisfied. His father's loss, worldly cares and the fever in his own heart consumed him. He saw the fulfilment of all the others and felt himself abandoned. There had been no response to his anguish, no comforting ray to cheer him. He begged Ramakrishna to allow him to relieve his misery by several days of Samadhi; but the Master rebuked him severely (he kept his indulgence for those from whom he expected least) and reproached him for such "base thoughts": he must make some arrangement for his family and then his troubles would be at an end and he would receive everything. Naren wept like a lost sheep, and fled through Calcutta and the fields, covered with dust and the straw of a stack into which he had run; he groaned, he was consumed with desire for the inaccessible, and his soul knew no rest. Ramakrishna, tenderly and pityingly, watched his wild course from afar: he knew quite well that before the divine prey could be brought down panting, he would have to pick up the scent. He felt that Naren's condition was remarkable, for in spite of boasting his unbelief, he was homesick for the Infinite. He knew him to be blessed among men in proportion as he was proven. He softly caressed Naren's face before the other disciples. He recognised in him all the signs of Bhakti—knowledge through love. The Bhaktas, unlike the

Jnanins (believers through knowledge of the spirit), do not seek liberation. They must be born and re-born for the good of humanity; for they are made for the love and the service of mankind. So long as an atom of desire remains they will be reincarnated. When all desires are torn from the heart of mankind then at last they will attain Mukti (liberation). But the Bhaktas never aspire to it themselves. And that is why the loving Master, whose heart was the home of all living beings, and who could never forget them, always had a preference for the Bhaktas, of whom the greatest was Naren.[1]

[1] "The Jnanin rejects Maya. Maya is like a veil (which he dispels). Look, when I hold this handkerchief in front of the lamp, you can no longer see its light." Then the Master held the handkerchief between him and the disciples and said: "Now you can no longer behold my face."

"The Bhakta does not reject Maya. He worships Mahamaya (the Great Illusion). He gives himself to Her and prays: 'Mother, get out of my way! Only so can I hope to realise Brahman."

"The Jnanin denies the three states,—the waking state, the dream and the deep sleep; the Bhakta accepts all three."

So Ramakrishna's tenderness, his natural preference, was for those who accepted everything, even Illusion, who affirmed and loved everything, who denied nothing, since Evil and Illusion itself are of God.

"It is not good to say from the very first: 'I see the Impersonal God.' Everything I see—men, women, animals, flowers, trees—is God."

The image of the veil to which Maya is compared, is also given at other times in the form of the beautiful parable of Sita and Rama:

"Rama, Lakshmana his brother and Sita were walking in the forest. Rama went first, then Sita, then Lakshmana. Sita was between the two brothers and so prevented Lakshmana from seeing Rama; but knowing how this made him suffer, in her tenderness and kindness, she sometimes leaned to one side so that he could see his brother."

He did not hide the fact that he regarded him as his heir. He said to him one day :

" I leave these young people in your charge. Busy yourself in developing their spirituality."

And in preparation for a monastic life he ordered them to beg their food from door to door without distinction of caste. Towards the end of March he gave them the saffron robe, the sign of the Sannyasin, and some kind of monastic initiation.

The proud Naren set the example of renunciation. But it was with great difficulty that he abdicated his spiritual pride. The devil would have offered him in vain (as to Jesus) the kingdoms of this world, but he would soon have found a chink in his armour if he had proposed sovereignty of soul to him. One day in order to test his spiritual power Naren told his companion, Kaliprasad, to touch him while he was in a state of meditation. Kali did so and immediately fell into the same state. Ramakrishna heard of it and rebuked Naren severely for casting his seek into the ground for a frivolous object, and he categorically condemned the transmission of ideas from one to the other. To attempt anything against complete freedom of spirit was anathema. You should help others, but you must not substitute your thought for theirs.

A little time afterwards Naren, while meditating, had the sensation of a light shining behind his head. Suddenly he lost consciousness and was absorbed into the Absolute. He had fallen into the depths of the terrible Nirvikalpa Samadhi, which he had sought for so long, and which Ramakrishna had refused to allow him. When, after a long time he returned to himself, it seemed to him that he no

longer had a body, but that he was nothing but a face, and he cried out: "Where is my body?" The other disciples were terrified and ran to the Master, but Ramakrishna said calmly:

"Very well, let him stay like that for a time! He has worried me long enough."

When Naren again came down to earth, he was bathed in ineffable peace. He approached the Master. Ramakrishna said to him:

"Now the Mother has shown you everything. But this revelation will remain under lock and key, and I shall keep the key. When you have accomplished the Mother's work you will find this treasure again."

And he advised him what to do for his health during the succeeding days.

The nearer he drew to his end, the more detached he became. He spread his serene heaven over the disciples' sorrow. The *Gospel,* written practically at the bedside of the dying man, records the harmonious murmurs of his soul like a stream in the night, amid the heavy silence of the apostles, while in the moonlight the branches of the trees in the garden rustled gently shaken by the warm breeze of the south. To his friends, his loved ones, who were inconsolable at the thought of his loss,[1] he said in a half whisper:

[1] Naren's passionate soul found it more difficult than the others to suppress his revolt against the law of suffering: (*Cf.* his dialogue of April 22 with Hirananda):

"The plan of this world is diabolical. I could have created a better world. Our only refuge is the faith that it is I who can do everything."

To which gentle Hirananda replied:

"That is more easy to say than to realise." And he added piously: "Thou (God) art everything. Not I, but Thou."

"Radha said to Krishna: 'O Beloved, dwell in my heart and do not come again in your human form!' But soon she languished for the sight of the human form of her Beloved. But the will of the Lord had to be fulfilled and Krishna did not appear in human form for a long time. . . . The Lord came and was incarnate in man. Then he returned with his disciples[1] to the Divine Mother."

Rakhal exclaimed: "Do not go away until we do!"

Ramakrishna smiled tenderly and said:

"A troupe of Bauls[2] suddenly entered a house; they sang God's name and danced for joy. Then they left the house as suddenly as they had entered it—and the owners did not know who they were. . . ."

He sighed.

"Sometimes I pray that the Lord will grant that I should no more be sent into this world."

But he went on at once:

"He (God) reclothes Himself with the human form for love of those pure souls who love the Lord."

And he looked at Naren with ineffable affection.

On the 9th of April Ramakrishna said, looking

But the proud and headstrong Naren repeated:

"Thou art I and I am Thou. There is nothing else but I."

Ramakrishna listened in silence smiling indulgently, and said pointing to Naren:

"He is moving about carrying as it were a naked sword in his hand."

[1] In Hindu belief each Avatara (Incarnation) is accompanied to earth by a train of elect souls, his disciples.

[2] A Hindu sect, intoxicated with God, who have renounced the world

at the fan, which he was waving to and fro in the hot night :

"Just as I see this fan I am holding in front of me, I have seen God. . . . And I see . . . ."—he spoke quite low, laying his hand on Naren's and asked : "What did I say ? "

Naren replied : "I did not hear distinctly."

Ramakrishna then indicated by signs that *He,* God, and his own self were one.

"Yes," said Naren, "I am He."

"Only a line intervenes—for the enjoyment of bliss," said the Master.

"But" said the disciple, "the great remain in the world even after they have realised their liberation. They keep their own ego and its sufferings so that they may fulfil the salvation of humanity."

There was absolutely silence and then the Master spoke again :

"The roof[1] is within a man's sight but it is very difficult to reach it ; . . . . but he who has reached it can let down a rope and pull others up to him upon the roof."

This was one of the days when he realised in

[1] The metaphor of the roof is often used in Ramakrishna's sayings :

"Divine Incarnations can always achieve knowledge of the Absolute in Samadhi. At the same time they can come down from the heights into human guise so that they love the Lord as father or mother, etc. . . . When they say : 'Not this ! Not this ! ' they leave the steps behind them one after the other until they reach the roof. And then they say : 'This is it ! ' But soon they discover that the steps are made of the same materials of bricks and mortar as the roof. Then they can ascend and descend resting sometimes on the roof, sometimes on the steps of the staircase. The roof represents the Absolute, the steps the world of phenomena." (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,* I, p. 324).

full the identity of all within the One Being ; when he saw that "all three were the same Substance—the victim, the block and the executioner," and he cried in a feeble voice : "My God, what a vision !" He fainted with emotion, but when came to himself he said : "I am well : I have never been so well."[1] Those who knew how terrible was the disease from which he died (cancer of the throat) marvelled at the loving and kindly smile that never left him. If the glorious death upon the Cross was denied to this man, who is the Christ to his Indian followers, his bed agony was no less a Cross.[2] And yet he could say :

"Only the body suffers. When the mind is united to God, it can feel no pain."

And again :

"Let the body and its sufferings occupy themselves with each other. Thou, my mind, remain in bliss. Now I and my Divine Mother are one for ever."[3]

Three or four days before his death he called Naren and asked to be left alone with him. He

[1] Ramakrishnananda, the disciple who nursed him, said : "He never lost his cheerfulness. He always said he was well and happy." (From his unpublished Memoirs).

[2] Swami Ashokananda has written to me that the photograph taken of Ramakrishna directly after his death and of which there is a copy in the Madras monastery, cannot be reproduced, so terribly was the body wasted and ravaged by the diseases. The sight is unbearable.

[3] Two days before his death in answer to Naren's unspoken desire to drag from him the avowal he was so loth to make, Ramakrishna said :

"He who was Rama and who was Krishna is now Ramakrishna in this body lying here ! "

But he added :

"Not in your Vedantic sense." (That is to say, not merely

looked lovingly at him and passed into an ecstasy. It enveloped Naren in its folds. When he came back from the shadows, he saw Ramakrishna in tears. The Master said to him :

"To day I have given you my all and am now only a poor fakir, possessing nothing. By this power you will do immense good in the world and not until it is accomplished will you return."[1]

From that moment all his powers were transfer-

in the sense of identity with the Absolute, but in the sense of Incarnation).

I am naturally not going to discuss the Hindu belief in the Avataras. Beliefs cannot be discussed and this one is of the same order as the Christian belief in the God-man. But what I want to remove from the mind of the Western reader is the idea that there was any feeling of monstrous pride on the part of those who believed that within them was the presence of God, like the simple Ramakrishna. At other times as when a faithful follower (in 1884) said to him : "When I see you I see God," he rebuked him : "Never say that. The wave is part of the Ganges, the Ganges is not part of the wave." (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,* II, p. 181). *Cf.* "The avataras are to Brahman what the waves are to the Ocean." (From *Sri Ramakrishna's Teachings,* par. 362). Ramakrishna considered that he was the habitation of God, who played within him hidden beneath the veil of his corruptible body. "A Divine Incarnation is hard to comprehend—it is the play of the Infinite on the finite." (*Ibid.,* 369). Only whereas the Divine Visitor in most men, even "in the saints, manifests Himself only in part like honey in a flower—you suck the flower and get a little honey—in the Incarnation it is all honey." (*Ibid,* 367). It is all one, for "the Avatara is always one and the same, appearing now here, now there, under different faces and names—Krishna, Christ, etc." (*Ibid*, 357). And the name of Christ ought to remind us of another moral aspect, which is always part of an Incarnation. The words "flower," "honey," "joy" should not lead us astray. There is always the element of Divine sacrifice, as in the case of Christ, when God becomes incarnate. (*Ibid*, 258).

[1] "To the Absolute" is to be understood.

red to Naren. The Master and the disciple were one.

Sunday, August 15, 1886. . . . The last day.

In the afternoon he still had the almost miraculous energy to talk for two hours to his disciples[1] in spite of his martyred throat. At nightfall he became unconscious. They believed him to be dead, but towards midnight he revived. Leaning against five or six pillows supported by the body of the humble disciple, Ramakrishnananda, he talked up to the last moment with Naren, the beloved disciple, and gave him his last counsel in a low voice. Then in ringing tones he cried three times the name of his life's Beloved, Kali, the Divine Mother, and lay back. The final ecstasy began. He remained in it until half an hour before noon, when he died.[2] In his own words of faith: "He had passed from one room to the other."

And his disciples cried:

"Victory!"[3]

[1] On the subject of Yoga.

[2] According to the witness of Sarkar. *Cf.* the unpublished Memoirs of Ramakrishnananda:

"On the last night Ramakrishna was talking with us to the very last. . . . He was sitting up against five or six pillows, which were supported by my body, and at the same time I was fanning (him). . . . Narendra took his feet and began to rub them and Ramakrishna was talking to him, telling him what he must do. 'Take care of these boys,' he repeated again and again. . . . Then he asked to lie down. Suddenly at one o'clock he fell towards one side, there was a low sound in his throat. . . . Narendra quickly laid his feet on the quilt and ran downstairs as if he could not bear it. A doctor . . . who was feeling his pulse saw that it had stopped. . . . We all believed that it was only Samadhi."

[3] Literally: "Victory to Bhagavan Ramakrishna!" as they carried him to the place of cremation, where his body was burned the same evening.

EPILOGUE

THE man himself was no more. His spirit had departed to travel along the path of collective life in the veins of humanity.

The fellowship of apostles began at once ; for the young disciples, the witnesses of his last months, found it impossible to return to the world. They were without resources. But four married disciples—Balaram Bose, to whom Ramakrishna's relics were entrusted for the time being, Surendranath Mitra, Mahendranath Gupta and Girish Chandra Ghosh, the converted comedian, encouraged them and helped them to found a home. Surendranath Mitra contributed money for the rent of a half-ruined house at Baranagore near the Ganges. This became the first Math or monastery of the disciples. A dozen or more gathered there under monastic cognomens which have hidden their real names from posterity. He who had been Naren, he who was and is for all time Vivekananda,[1] put himself at their head by common consent. He was the most energetic, the most vital, the most intelligent—and the Master himself had nominated him. The others were tempted to shut themselves up in solitude and to allow themselves to be buried beneath an intoxicating stupor of memory and of grief ; but the great disciple who knew better than they all the fascination but at the same time the danger of such a course, devoted

[1] This was the name he adopted several years later. In the next volume I shall trace its origin.

himself to their instruction. He was like a tornado of fire in the midst of these hermits; he roused them from their sorrow and ecstasy; he forced them to learn the thoughts of the outside world; he flooded them with the refreshing rain of his vast intellect; he made them taste of all the branches of the tree of knowledge—comparative religion, science, history, sociology; for he wished them to gain a universal perspective, he led them to fruitful discussion without ceasing for a single instant to maintain the sacred fire.

It was at the symbolic season of Christmas, 1886, that the act giving birth to the Man-Gods was signed and sealed. The story is an arresting one, for it contains the thrill of an unforseen encounter in the night between the *"Beau Dieu"*[1] of the West and the Word of India.

They were assembled at Antpur in the house of the mother of one of the disciples (Baburam).

"It was late in the evening when the monks gathered together before the fire. Huge logs of wood were brought by them and ignited; and soon a raging flame burned upwards, making the darkness beautiful by contrast. And overhead was the canopy of the Indian night, and all around was the ineffable peace of the rural stillness. Meditation began continuing for a long time. Then a break was made and the Leader (Vivekananda) filled the silence with the story of the Lord Jesus.[2] From the very beginning, from the

[1] The literal meaning is "beautiful God." So the French people call a celebrated statue of Christ on the portal of the Gothic cathedral of Amiens.

[2] Vivekananda had a passionate regard for Christ, whose Divinity Ramakrishna, as we have seen, had acknowledged.

wondrous mystery of birth it commenced. The monks were raised into beatitude with the Virgin Mary when the Saviour's coming was announced to her. . . . The monks lived with Jesus during the days of His Childhood ; they were with Him in the Flight into Egypt. They were with Him in the Temple surrounded by the Jewish Pandits hearing and answering their questions. They were with Him at the time when He gathered His first disciples, and they adored Him as they adored their own Master.[1] The many points of similarity in thought and action as well as the relationship with the disciples, between Christ and Ramakrishna, forcibly brought to their minds the old days of esctasy with their Master. The words of Christ the Redeemer rang upon their ears as familiar sayings."

And the story of the Passion, of the Crucifixion, threw them into the depths of meditation. Through Naren's eloquence they had been admitted to the apostolic circle where Paul preached the Gospel. The fire of Pentecost consumed their souls in the peace of the Bengal village ; and the mingled names of Christ and of Ramakrishna stole upon the night air.

Then Vivekananda appealed to the monks. He besought them to become Christs in their turn, to work for the redemption of the world, to renounce all as Jesus had done and to realise God. Standing before the wood fire, their faces reddened by the leaping flames, the crackling of the logs, the

[1] Of two among them, Sasibhushan (Ramakrishnananda) and Saratchandra (Saradananda), Ramakrishna had said that they had been the disciples of Christ in a former life.

only sound that broke the stillness of their thoughts, they solemnly took the vows of everlasting Sannyasa, each before his fellows and all in the sight of God.

And it was not until that moment when all had been accomplished that the monks remembered that that very night was Christmas Eve.[1]

A beautiful symbol of profound significance heralding the Nativity of a new Day of God. . . .

But Europe must not be misled when she reads this story. This was no return to Jordan. Rather it was the confluence of the Jordan and the Ganges. The two united streams flowed together along their wider river bed.

*

From its very inception the new Order had in it something that was unique. Not only did it contain within itself the energy of faith both of the East and of the West, not only did it unite an encyclopaedic study of the sciences and religious meditation, but in it the ideal of contemplation was wedded to the ideal of human service. From the first Ramakrishna's spiritual sons were not allowed to shut themselves up within the walls of a monastery. One after the other they went out to wander through the world as mendicant monks. Only one, Ramakrishnananda (Sasibhushan), the guardian of the relics, remained in the dovecote whither the birds of passage returned from time to time for rest. During the last months of the Master's life the humble ideal of Martha had been adopted—"*Dienen . . . . Dienen*"—to Serve (the

[1] *The Life of the Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II.

word of Parsifal) ! They practised it in their service for the suffering Master, in the service of the bodies of those whose spirit was engrossed in the service of God, and in service to the praying brethren. This was the Master's own way of "realisation" and the aged Tolstoy would have said that he had chosen the better part.

But each had his own part to play, for each unconsciously through the very bent of his nature represented one phase or one aspect of the multiform personality of Ramakrishna. When they were assembled together he was there in his entirety.

Their mighty spokesman, Vivekananda, on behalf of them all was to spread throughout the world the Word of him, who, he claimed, was the living synthesis of all the spiritual forces of India :

"I . . . . had the great good fortune to sit at the feet of one, ... whose life, a thousandfold more than whose teaching, was a living commentary on the texts of the *Upanishads,* was in fact the spirit of the *Upanishads* living in human form . . . . the harmony of all the diverse thoughts of India . . . . India has been rich in thinkers and sages. . . . The one had a great head (Sankara) the other a large heart (Chaitanya) and the time was ripe for one to be born, the embodiment of both this head and heart . . . . who in one body would have the brilliant intellect of Sankara and the wonderfully expansive infinite heart of Chaitanya : one who would see in every sect the same spirit working, the same God ; one who would see God in every being, one whose heart would weep for the poor, the weak, for the out-

cast, for the down-trodden, for everyone in this world, inside India or outside India ; and at the same time whose grand brilliant intellect would conceive of such noble thoughts as would harmonise all conflicting sects . . . and bring a marvellous harmony, the universal religion of head and heart into existence ; such a man was born. . . . The time was ripe, it was necessary that such a man should be born, and he came ; and the most wonderful part of it was, that his life's work was just near a city which was full of Western thought, a city which had run mad after these Occidental ideas, a city which had become more Europeanised than any other city in India. There he lived without any book-learning whatsoever ; this great intellect never learnt even to write his own name, but the most brilliant graduates of our university found in him an intellectual giant[1] . . . . the sage for the time, one whose teaching is just now, in the present time, most beneficial. . . . If I have

[1] A great philosophical and religious mind of the India of to-day, Aurobindo Ghose, has paid a brilliant tribute to Ramakrishna's genius, throwing into prominence the exceptional multiplicity of his spiritual powers and the still more exceptional soul directing them :

"In a recent and unique example, in the life of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, we see a colossal spiritual capacity first driving straight to the divine realisaton, taking, as it were, the kingdom of heaven by violence, and then seizing upon one Yogic method after another and extracting the substance out of it with an incredible rapidity, always to return to the heart of the whole matter, the realisation and possession of God by the power of love, by the extension of inborn spirituality into various experience and by the spontaneous play of an intuitive knowledge. Such an example cannot be generalised. Its object also was special and temporal, to exemplify in the great and decisive experience of a master-soul the truth, now most necessary to humanity, towards

told you one word of truth it was his and his alone, and if I have told you many things which were not correct, . . . they were all mine, and on me is the responsibility."[1]

Thus at the feet of the simple Ramakrishna the most intellectual, the most imperious, the most justly proud of all the great religious spirits of modern India humbled himself. He was the St. Paul of this Messiah of Bengal. He founded his Church and his doctrine. He travelled throughout the world and was the aqueduct, akin to those red arches which span the Roman Compagna, along which the waters of the spirit have flowed from India to the Europes[2] and from the Europes back to India, joining scientific reason to Vedantic faith and the past to the future.

It is this Journey of the soul that I intend to trace in a succeding volume. In this present one I have led European thought to those far distant countries of religious mythology, where their Briarcus tree, the giant banyan, too often considered by the West to be dried up and withered,

which a world long divided into jarring sects and schools is with difficulty labouring, that all sects are forms and fragments of a single integral truth and all disciplines labour in their different ways towards one supreme experience. To know, be and possess the Divine is the one thing needful and it includes or leads up to all the rest . . . . all the rest that the Divine Will chooses for us, all necessary form and manifestation, will be added." ("The Synthesis of Yoga," *Arya*. Pondicherry. No. 5 December, 1914).

In this way the essential significance of the personality and life of Ramakrishna has been realised by a master metaphysician of India to-day.

[1] Speeches at Calcutta and Madras: *The Vedanta in All its Phases*, and *The Sages of India*.

[2] Mother Europe and her brood of the Americas.

still continues to shoot out great flowering branches. I shall then lead it back by unsuspected paths to its home where modern reason sits enthroned. And it will discover at the end of the course that between one country and another the gulf of centuries separating them is, when subjected to the "wireless" of free understanding, no greater than a hair's breadth and the space of a second.

R. R.

Christmas 1928

NOTE I

SARADA DEVI AND THE BRIGANDS[1]

"In order to join her husband Sarada Devi had often to cross the plain between Kamarpukur and Dakshineswar on foot, and at that time it was infested with bands of brigands, worshippers of Kali. . . .

"One day she was returning to Dakshineswar in the company of several others. She was so tired when night fell that she could not keep up with the rest of the little band and dropped behind. Soon they were lost to view and she found herself alone in complete darkness at the beginning of the dangerous plain. At that moment she saw a swarthy man coming towards her. He was big and strong and carried a club on his shoulder; he was followed by another figure. She saw that there was no possibility of escape and remained motionless. The man came up to her and said in a rough voice :

"'What are you doing here at this time of night?'

"She answered him :

"'Father, my companions left me behind and I have lost myself. Will you be so kind as to take me to them? Your son-in-law dwells in the temple of Kali at Dakshineswar. I am going to him. If you will take me as far as that, he will be most grateful to you.'

"At that moment the other figure came up. Sarada Devi realised with relief that it was the man's wife. She took her by the hand and said :

"'Mother, I am your daughter Sarada. I am lost here and all alone. My companions have deserted

[1] See page 94, I resume the story.

me. Fortunately you and my father turned up! Otherwise I do not know what I should have done.'

"Her simple ways, her absolute trust, and her sweet words touched the hearts of the man and woman. They belonged to the lowest caste; but they forgot everything and treated Sarada as their daughter. She was tired. They would not allow her to continue her journey; they made her sleep at a shop in the neighbouring village. The woman took off her own clothes in order to make a bed for her. The man brought her some puffed rice that he had bought at the shop. They watched over her all night as if they had been indeed her parents, and in the morning they took her as far as Tarakeswar, where they begged her to rest. The woman said to her husband:

"'My daughter did not have much to eat yesterday. Go and fetch some fish and vegetables for her from the bazaar. She must have better food to-day.'

"While the man had gone to fetch them, Sarada's companions came back to look for her. She introduced her Bagdi[1] parents to them and said:

"'I do not know what I should have done, if they had not come to the rescue.'

"'When we separated,' so she told afterwards, 'this single night had made us so dear to one another that I wept for grief when I said good-bye to them. I made them promise to come to Dakshineswar to see me. They followed us for some time. The woman picked a few green peas growing at the side of the road and wrapped them in a fold of my sari, and said: "Mother Sarada, to-night when you eat your puffed rice take these with it." . . . . They came to see me several times at Dakshineswar and

[1] A low caste.

brought me different presents. "He"[1] behaved towards them as if he were their son-in-law, and treated them with great affection and respect. . . . But although my Dacoit[2] father was so good and simple, I suspect that he had more than once committed acts of brigandage.' . . . ."

(Adapted from *The Modern Review*, June 1927)

[1] "He," that is to say, "my husband." An orthodox Hindu wife must never name her husband.

[2] Indian term for a brigand.

NOTE II

SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND KESHAB CHANDRA SEN

(By the Publisher)

It has been thought necessary to say a few words in refutation of the charges brought by M. Romain Rolland against the followers of Sri Ramakrishna in Chapter VII, *Ramakrishna and the Great Shepherds of India*. The main charge is that the followers of Sri Ramakrishna claim Keshab to be one of his disciples, whereas "it is not true that any one of his (Keshab's) essential ideas was derived from him (Sri Ramakrishna); for they were already formed when he met Ramakrishna for the first time." At the outset we beg to state that not one of us looks upon Keshab as a disciple (as the word is usually understood) of Sri Ramakrishna. M. Rolland has further expressed regret that we have given a partial account of the relations between Sri Ramakrishna and Keshab. First then we would urge that it was not necessary for us to go into details, as Keshab's intimate associates themselves,—Pratap Ch. Mozoomdar, Girish Ch. Sen, Chiranjib Sarma and others—have left clear statements about those relations. M. Rolland has rejected the testimony of those gentlemen. But we still maintain their accuracy and authenticity.

Is it true that Keshab did not derive any ideas from Sri Ramakrishna and had formed all his ideas before he met Sri Ramakrishna? We do not think that there is enough evidence to support this inference. Keshab's mature thought found expression in what he called the New Dispensation. Was it conceived before Keshab met Sri Ramakrishna? The three

most important elements of that thought are: the worship of God as Mother; the recognition of all religions and prophets as true; and the assimilation of Hindu polytheism into Brahmoism. M. Rolland observes that Keshab did not require Sri Ramakrishna's help to arrive at the conception of the Mother; the idea was not created by Sri Ramakrishna. Quite so. But there is a world of difference between the *knowledge* of an idea and the *acceptance* of it; and Keshab's mere knowledge of the idea of the Motherhood of God does not prove that in Keshab's *acceptance* of that idea Sri Ramakrishna had no influence. Why did Keshab reject the idea when he became a Brahmo? And why did he afterwards return to it? What was the decisive factor in the reacceptance? M. Rolland mentions that the Adi Brahmo Samaj had accepted the idea of God's Motherhood, and Keshab himself had referred to it in 1866 and 1875. But it cannot be denied that such references were extremely rare and casual. It was only about 1879 that Keshab's worship of God as Mother became earnest and deep. The question naturally arises: what was the reason for this change in Keshab? We claim that it was the example and influence of Sri Ramakrishna.

We shall give only three quotations in confirmation of our view. Pratap Ch. Mozoomdar, referring to Sri Ramakrishna's meeting with Keshab, says (*in his Life of Keshub Chunder Sen*): "Keshub's own trials and sorrows about the time of the Cooch Behar marriage* had spontaneously suggested to him the necessity of regarding God as Mother. In his devotional colloquies he often addressed the Deity in various forms of the word Mother. And now the sympathy, friendship, and example of the Paramahamsa

* Which, by the way, took place in 1878. It is good to remember that Sri Ramakrishna and Keshab met in 1875.

converted the Motherhood of God into a subject of special culture with him. The greater part of the year 1879 witnessed the development. It became altogether a new feature of the Revival which Keshub was specially bringing about." On February 1, 1880, Keshab wrote in *The Sunday Mirror*: "Let our readers accept the cheering message. A new Dispensation has come down upon the Brahmo Samaj which proclaims a new programme to India. Its chief merit is its freshness, and its own watchword is—God, the Mother of India . . . . all its changes are rung upon that single word—God Mother." This extract shows that Keshab himself considered the idea of the worship of God as Mother as a new feature with the Brahmo Samaj in 1880.) In October, 1879, Keshab sent out a proclamation which contained the following passage: "'Go and proclaim me Mother of India,' said the Lord to his disciples gathered round him. 'Many are ready to worship me as their father. But they know not I am their mother too, tender, indulgent, forbearing, forgiving, always ready to take back the penitent child. Ye shall go forth from city to city and from village to village singing my mercies, and proclaiming unto all men that I am India's Mother . . .'" (The passage speaks for itself. It is interesting to note that when this proclamation was published—in which Keshab also said: "What is it but a prejudice to object to the application of the term 'Mother' to God?"—many Brahmos characterised it as an "undisguised piece of blasphemy.")

With regard to the harmony of the great religions such as Hinduism and Christianity, and the assimilation of the different sectarian aspects of Hinduism, we hold that in this also Keshab was profoundly influenced by Sri Ramakrishna. M. Rolland's statements in these respects are vitiated by wrong dates.

In Chapter VI (*The Builders of Unity*) he has written that Keshab went on a missionary tour in 1873, during which he believed he had found the key to the popular polytheism; and that Keshab began to proclaim the New Dispensation in 1875. Both these are wrong dates. Keshab proclaimed the New Dispensation not in 1875, but on the 25th January, 1880. In order to be quite sure on this point, the editor of *Prabuddha Bharata* wrote to the editor of *Nava-Vidhan*, the organ of the New Dispensation Church. He gave him the latter date. It is true Keshab used the words *New Dispensation* in his lecture, *Behold the Light of Heaven in India* delivered in 1875. But the lecture itself contained little or nothing of the teaching which he proclaimed later as the New Dispensation. It was devoted to the consideration of the proof of Divine existence and certain moral qualities which he said constituted a special dispensation of God at that critical period of India's history. There was no mention of the harmony of religions. M. Rolland mentions Keshab's lecture on *The Future Church* delivered in 1869 as another proof of Keshab's early conception of the harmony of religions. The lecture was not devoted to a visualisation of all religions as a vast symphony, wherein each one while keeping its distinctive character, united in praise of God. In that lecture Keshab recognised that there is some truth in every religion. But he strongly condemned image-worship, pantheism and the idea of Divine Incarnation. He did not intend to maintain the different creeds intact in his Future Church. He wanted to extract the essence of the different religions and make that the cardinal doctrine of his Church. This doctrine according to him was the Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of man. And he prophesied that "surely the future church of this country will be the result of purer

elements of the leading creeds of the day, harmonised, developed, and shaped under the influence of Christianity." This, it must be amitted, is far from the harmony of religions, even as Keshab afterwards conceived it. Our opinion is that Keshab was always more or less eclectic. Every founder of a new religious school is eclectic to some extent, unless he is extremely fanatical or original; for he has to accommodate the proved religious truths in his new religion. Keshab, it is true, was more than merely that. But until he met Sri Ramakrishna and watched him practising the harmony of religions, he did not possess a clear idea how to conceive and formulate it properly. Had it not been so, why did not Keshab preach the harmony of religions earlier than 1880?

Pratap Ch. Mozoomdar has left a clear account of how the New Dispensation came to be proclaimed. After this schism in his Church as a result of the Cooch Behar marriage and the persecutions to which he was then subjected, with their attendant suffering, he felt the need of a revival. According to Pratap: "One evening while Keshub lay in bed, and we had proceeded far into the excitement of such a talk, he suddenly got up and said, there must be a great and unprecedented Revival, if the Brahmo Samaj is to tide over the present crisis. In devotions, disciplines, doctrines and missionary activities, there should be introduced all along the line such a spirit of Revival as had never yet been seen. We all concurred in the idea, but we did not perceive that what Keshub said was the result of long intense meditation and much earnest prayer, that it boded a kind of activity for which none was prepared." Pratap adds: "When therefore Keshub spoke of a Revival in 1879, he meant a further advance, a greater advance than had been ever made before, *on the lines of a new revelation, a new life, altogether a new departure.*"

(Mark the words italicised by us.) Keshab had not conceived the harmony of religions before he met Sri Ramakrishna, but he understood and proclaimed it (in his own way, it is true) after some five years of intimate association with him who was the brightest example and exponent of that principle. What conclusion are we to draw from this? Is it not legitimate to conclude that Keshab's acceptance and preaching of the harmony of religions was due to Sri Ramakrishna's influence? That this was so, is confirmed by what Pratap Ch. Mozoomdar himself writes in his *Life of Keshub Chunder Sen*. After describing Sri Ramakrishna's harmonisation of the principal religions as well as of the different Hindu creeds, he says: "This strange eclecticism suggested to Keshub's appreciative mind the thought of broadening the spiritual structure of his own movement." We have also the indirect witness of the editor of *Nava-Vidhan*. He wrote to the editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*: "Undoubtedly the declaration of the New Dispensation in 1880 is the self-expression of the New Birth that came in him—birth that came after long travails, and every new birth in him had for its necessary conditions the influence of many characters. And what is Keshab, if he is not the spirit of perpetual discipleship? . . . ."

Therefore there is not the least doubt that Keshab's acceptance of Hindu polytheism also was due to Sri Ramakrishna's influence. We have already said that M. Rolland's mention of the year 1873 as the year when Keshab came to understand the significance of Hindu polytheism is incorrect. Keshab did so, according to Pratap Ch. Mozoomdar, in the year 1879, when he again went on a missionary tour. We have already quoted Pratap as stating that Sri Ramakrishna's "eclecticism" had influenced Keshab. Pratap adds a few sentences later: "In his Bengali

sermons about this time (1879-80), he accordingly took up Hindu gods and goddesses by name, and explained the idea that underlay each." And as M. Rolland himself has mentioned, Keshab wrote his article on *The Philosophy of Idol-worship* on August 1, 1880 in *The Sunday Mirror*. The witness of the editor of *Nava-Vidhan* is still more conclusive. To a query on this point, he replied: "I do not know of any of his utterances and writings of pre-New Dispensation days, where he interpreted Hindu image-worship." And in a letter which Mozoomdar addressed to Prof. Max Muller in September, 1895, he wrote: "Both in Keshub's Life and Teachings, and in the old *Theistic Review*, I have frankly and warmly expressed my estimate of that saintly man (Sri Ramakrishna) and our obligations to him."

Let us quote two more competent witnesses. The one is Swami Vivekananda. Though he was a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, his evidence, eye-witness as he was of the relations of Sri Ramakrishna and Keshab, is not without value and authority:

"He (Keshab) would sit for hours at the feet of Ramakrishna and listen with rapture to the wonderful sayings on religion of that wonderful man. From time to time Ramakrishna would be lost in a deep Samadhi, and Keshab would gently touch his feet that he might thereby be purified. Sometimes he would invite the Paramahamsa to his house, or would take him in a boat and proceed a few miles up and down the river. He then used to question him on some points of religion to clear away his own doubts. A strong and deep love grew up between the two, and Keshab's whole life became changed, till, a few years later, he proclaimed his views of religion as the New Dispensation, which was nothing but a partial representation of the truths which Ramakrishna had taught for a long time."

The other witness is Prof. Max Muller. The quotation below is from an article, *A Real Mahatman*, which he had contributed to *The Nineteenth Century* in 1896, before he so much as knew any of Sri Ramakrishna's disciples. The Professor wrote:

"Pratap Chunder Mozoomdar, the leader of the Brahmo Samaj, and well known to many people in England, tells me of the extraordinary influence which the Mahatman (Sri Ramakrishna) exercised on Keshub Chunder Sen, on himself, and on a large number of highly educated men in Calcutta. . . . But what is most interesting is the fact that it was the Mahatman who exercised the greatest influence on Keshub Chunder Sen during the last phase of his career. It was a surprise to many of Keshub Chunder's friends and admirers to observe the sudden change of the sober reformer into the mystic and ecstatic saint, that took place towards the end of his life. But although this later development of the New Dispensation, and more particularly the doctrine of the Motherhood of God, may have alienated many of Keshub Chunder Sen's European friends, it seems to have considerably increased his popularity with Hindu society. At all events we are now enabled to understand the hidden influences which caused so sudden a change, and produced so marked a deviation in the career of the famous founder of the Brahmo Samaj, which has sometimes been ascribed to the break-down of an over-excited brain." (This clearly shows that Keshab's friends noted a sudden change of ideas and outlook in him towards the end of his life, and that he had not formed all his principal ideas, as M. Rolland contends, years before he first met Sri Ramakrishna in 1875.)

We must remember here that Prof. Max Muller was a contemporary and friend of Keshab and that he had been watching his career closely. But the verdict

quoted above seems to have caused a great sensation among the followers of Keshab. They appear to have sent his earnest protest against it and given him their own version of the interrelations between Sri Ramakrishna and Keshab. Max Muller, however, stuck to his own judgment which he considered correct, as is evident from his remarks in his book, *Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings*.

Our conclusion is, therefore, that Keshab Ch. Sen was a great soul possessing a great religious genius with an inborn tendency towards eclecticism,—a fact which explains his extraordinary appreciation of Sri Ramakrishna; but that it was his association with Sri Ramakrishna that made him develop his eclectic outlook until it appeared in the form of the New Dispensation; further that with regard to the Motherhood of God and Hindu Polytheism, his assimilation of these two ideas was still more directly due to Sri Ramakrishna's example and influence.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. The chief source for the history of Ramakrishna is the great Biography, compiled from the accounts of his disciples and published by the Swami Madhavananda:

Life of Sri Ramakrishna, compiled from various authentic sources,—one volume of 765 pages in the edition of the Advaita Ashrama (the intellectual centre of the Order), Mayavati, Almora, Himalayas 1925. (Himalayan Series, No. XLVII).

It is prefaced with a short introduction by Gandhi, which I feel it is of interest to reproduce:

The story of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa's life is a story of religion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face. No one can read the story of his life without being convinced that God alone is real and that all else is an illusion. Ramakrishna was a living embodiment of godliness. His sayings are not those of a mere learned man, but they are pages from the Book of Life. They are revelations of his own experience. They therefore leave on the reader an impression which he cannot resist. In this age of scepticism Ramakrishna presents an example of a bright and loving faith which gives solace to thousands of men and women who would otherwise have remained without spiritual light. Ramakrishna's life was an object lesson in Ahimsa. His love knew no limits geographical or otherwise. May his divine love be an inspiration to all who read the following pages.

M. K. GANDHI

SABARMATI.
Margsheersh, Krishna 1,
Vikram Samvat, 1981.

As is shown by an editorial note this work is based

on the labours of Swami Saradananda, a direct disciple of the Master and the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission for more than a quarter of a century; on those of Ramachandra Dutt and of Akshay Kumar Sen, both of them disciples of Ramakrishna; on memories collected by Priyanath Sinha (alias Gurudas Varman), a disciple of Vivekananda; on the Discourses of the Master taken down by Mahendra Nath Gupta.

This compilation is valuable because of the religious care which has been taken to collect in it literally all the documents at first hand, which had been scattered abroad. But it is inconvenient because they are presented without any arrangement and without criticism. And the lack (up to the present) of an alphabetical index makes research into it very difficult.

2. Of much greater value from the point of view of arrangement and reason is the work of Swami Saradananda. It consists of five volumes written in Bengali, which, however, do not give a consecutive and full account of the life. The story, unfortunately interrupted by the death of Saradananda in 1927, stops short at the point when Ramakrishna during his last illness was moved to the gardens of Cossipore, and therefore the last months are missing. The work is also incomplete with regard to Ramakrishna's disciples, with one or two exceptions, the most noteworthy being Vivekananda.

The title of the series in Bengali is:

Sri Ramakrishna-lilaprasanga. [Discourse on the Lila (the play) of Ramakrishna.]

The titles of the 5 volumes in Bengali are as follows: *Balya-jiwana* (the youth of Ramakrishna); *Sadhaka-bhava* (Ramakrishna as Sadhaka); *Gurubhava* (Sri Ramakrishna as Guru or Master); *Divyabhava* (Ramakrishna in the divine form).

Only two volumes have appeared in English; the

first written by Saradananda himself; the second translated from the original Bengali.

Some of the other chapters from the Bengali work have been published in the Reviews of the Ramakrishna Order: *Prabuddha Bharata* (in particular the relations of Ramakrishna with Vivekananda), and in another English magazine.

Saradananda planned this work in the form of an exposition of the various aspects of his life without presenting it in the form of a consecutive narrative. The two first volumes in Bengali were written according to this plan. Then Saradananda changed it to the form of an ordinary biography. The third volume is devoted to the youth, the fourth to the years when Ramakrishna was practising his Sadhana; it takes us to the end of this exercise and to the first relations with the Brahmo Samaj, where the part played by Ramakrishna as a teacher (but not yet as a religious manifestation) is brought out. The fifth volume describes the Master in the midst of his disciples and the beginning of his illness. At this point he saw the death of the "Holy Mother" (Ramakrishna's wife), and then that of Swami Brahmananda, who with Vivekananda, had been the favourite disciple and the first Abbot of the Order. He was so overwhelmed with grief that he abandoned his writing work and gave himself up wholly to meditation.

Incomplete though the work remains, it is excellent for the subject. Saradananda is an authority both as a philosopher and as an historian. His books are rich in metaphysical sketches, which place the spiritual appearance of Ramakrishna exactly in its place in the rich procession of Hindu thought.

If variations appear between the Bengali work of Saradananda and the *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* (No. 1), which is the collective work of the Ramakrishna Order, the latter must be given the preference (accord-

ing to the evidence I have received from Swami Ashokananda), for it was drawn up with Saradananda's help after his own work.

3. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna (according to M., a son of the Lord and disciple), or the Ideal Man for India and the World,* 2 volumes, Madras, published by the Ramakrishna Math, 1897, (preceded by two approving letters of Vivekananda), 2nd Edition, 1911. New editions in 1922-24.[1]

This *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is as valuable as the great Biography (No. 1), for it is the faithful account of M. (Mahendra Nath Gupta, the head of an educational establishment at Calcutta) of the Discourses with the Master, either his own or those which he actually heard from the summer of 1882 for the next four years. Their exactitude is almost stenographic. A good alphabetical index makes it possible to find one's way among the diversity of subjects treated in the course of the days.

4. *The Life of the Swami Vivekananda, by his Eastern and Western Disciples,* the Advaita Ashrama, Himalayas, the semi-centenary birthday memorial edition in three volumes,[2] published by the Swami Virajananda from the Prabuddha Bharata Office, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Almora, Himalayas; volumes I and II, 1914; volume III, 1915; volume IV, 1918.

This great life of Ramakrishna's chief disciple has not only a capital interest for its own history, but for

[1] To my great regret the only two volumes of the *Gospel,* which I could procure, were of two different editions: the first volume belonged to the 4th edition of 1924, the second volume to the first of 1922. But it may be presumed that in so short an interval the arrangement and style differed but little.

[2] In reality there are four, and not three volumes in this publication.

that of his Master, since it embodies his own direct memories.

It is also useful to consult *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda,* in 7 volumes. He often speaks of his Master with pious gratitude. He dedicated to him in particular a celebrated lecture in New York published under the title: *My Master,* in volume IV of the *Complete Works.*

5. *Sri Ramakrishna's Teachings,* 2 small volumes, 1916 and 1920, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati.

These are a collection of thoughts delivered during the various Discourses of the Master, in particular in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,* and arranged in methodical order. It is especially valuable as a little practical volume. It appeared piecemeal in the Review of the Order, *Prabuddha Bharata,* and in other Indian Reviews between 1900 and 1913. A German edition is at the moment being prepared.

6. *Words of the Master* (*Selected Precepts of Sri Ramakrishna*), compiled by Swami Brahmananda, 1924, Udbodhan Office, Baghbazar, Calcutta.

Another small anthology, chiefly interesting on account of the personality of the anthologist.

7. *Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings,* by Max Muller, Longmans, Green and Co., 1st edition, 1898, new edition, 1923.

Max Muller knew Vivekananda personally in England; and he asked him to give him a complete account of the life of his Master. His small work is therefore based on first-hand evidence; and he uses it with his broad and clear critical spirit, in which are allied the scientific exigences of the West and a generous understanding of all forms of thought.

8. *The Face of Silence,* by Dhan Gopal Mukherji, New York, E. P. Dutton and Co., 1926.

This work, which is of exceptional value as a work of art, is a brilliant evocation of the figure of the

Master in the atmosphere of the India of his time. Mukerji has consulted all the principal documents. He has also interviewed several of the eminent personalities of the Ramakrishna Mission, who knew the Master, in particular Swami Turiyananda, and he has used the Memoirs of Swami Premananda, one of Ramakrishna's dearest disciples. The Ramakrishna Mission has not taken in very good part the liberties due at times to the lively imagination of the artist in the reported words; and it has issued a warning against some of its "theological" interpretations, whose character seem of too personal a nature. For my own part I can never forget that it was to the perusal of this beautiful book that I owe my first knowledge of Ramakrishna and the impetus leading me to undertake this work. I here record my gratitude. With extraordinary talent and tact Mukerji in this book has chosen and put in the limelight those features in Ramakrishna's personality which will most attract the spirit of Europe and America without shocking it. I have felt it necessary to go beyond his precautions and to cite exact documents without allowing myself to "embroider" them.

9. It is useful to consult the Reviews of the Ramakrishna Order, which have published and still continue to publish studies and unpublished memories of the Master and his disciples—chiefly *Prabuddha Bharata* and *The Vedanta Kesari*.

I said at the outset how much I owe to the good counsels and the information of the Ramakrishna Mission, which has tirelessly put at my disposal its documents and replied to my questions. I can only repeat my thanks.

